



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

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(21 November 2011 to 15 December 2011)

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Minister of the Environment	Mr Alex Attwood

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

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Settings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 21 November 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Single Farm Payments: Disallowance

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I wish to make a statement on the issue of financial correction by the European Commission and the programme of work that the Department is taking forward to address that.

First, I thank my colleague junior Minister Anderson for stepping into the breach last Monday when members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development debated a motion on the issue. I am grateful for the Committee's interest in the issue and would like to reassure its members that it has been my intention for some time to make a statement in November to give them an update on developments since Michelle Gildernew's statement in September 2010. Although I do not want to go over old ground that was well covered at that time, given the complexity of the issue and to avoid any misunderstanding, it is important that I put the issue into context, explain the problem, quantify the amount of disallowance and explain how we are funding that and reassure the Assembly that we are solving that problem.

I will take the problem first. As a paying agency, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is responsible for the payment of around €300 million a year to the agriculture industry. DARD is accountable to the European Commission for ensuring that that €300 million is paid accurately and in a timely fashion to those entitled to receive it. That means that the various scheme rules have to be complied with by those claiming the subsidy and that DARD, as a paying agency, has to be able to demonstrate that compliance through its administrative checks and on-the-spot controls.

Since the single farm payment was introduced in 2005, European Commission auditors have audited DARD on a number of occasions, commencing in 2006. The Commission has found fault with the controls operated by the paying agency, resulting in disallowance. In their visits here in 2006, 2008 and 2009, Commission auditors raised concerns about the control of the single farm payment scheme. In 2006, they advised that our mapping system was not good enough; that our farmers were not telling us of changes to their fields; that our on-the-ground controls by inspectors were not sufficiently rigorous; and that our approach to sanctions and penalties was too lenient. Those concerns were reiterated during further audits in 2008 and 2009.

Also in 2008, the auditors highlighted that our approach of permitting two farmers to use the same parcel of land to support two separate schemes — for example, the single farm payment scheme and the countryside management scheme — was not, in their view, in line with regulations. In addition to those area aids audits, in 2008 the Commission examined how we had allocated single farm payment entitlements in 2005. Those entitlements are an essential requirement for a farmer to make claims. A farmer must have one entitlement for each hectare of eligible land claimed. Concerns were raised about a number of policy issues.

The Department's response in the early years was understandably one of challenge, particularly because, at the outset, there was little or no evidence of other countries facing a similar problem. The Department also considered that the scale of the disallowance was manifestly disproportionate because the payments were based on entitlements that had an historic as well as an area component, and the Department thought that, at the very worst, the rate of disallowance should have been applied to the area component only. It is important to add that the Department did not have the benefit in 2006 of knowing that other countries were going to be visited with similar audit findings.

The Commission system is not particularly transparent, but, once disallowances began to roll out across more and more countries, it became clearer that the Commission was embarking on a course from which it would not easily resile. So, when the question is put whether the Department was wrong to challenge for so long rather than to seek immediately to comply with the Commission's findings at an earlier stage, it is clear with the benefit of hindsight that it should have sought to comply sooner.

As highlighted in last week's debate, the Commission's own processes contributed to these matters being protracted. Members were right to note that the first area aids audit was in July 2006, yet the final decision on that was not announced until July 2010, which was a full four years after the audit. In 2009, although DARD still believed that the Commission's approach was heavy-handed, it recognised that it had to move to satisfy the Commission's concerns on maps or face continued and probably increased disallowance. Also in 2009, my Department moved to make its own estimate of the risk to the fund so that it had some hard figures to take to the Commission, and a risk assessment exercise was taken forward, the aim of which was to estimate the risk to the fund resulting from claims on ineligible land. A sample of 400 farm businesses, which is 1% of the claimant population, was selected, and the corresponding aerial photography was carefully viewed

to identify and measure ineligible features. The results of that exercise showed that the error rate was 2.72% for ineligible areas claimed and 2.05% for incorrect payments made. However, the Commission maintains that penalties that would be applied to individual farmer claims for overdeclaration of land must be included in the calculation. So, when that is done, the risk to the fund increases from 2.05% to 5.19%. Those figures are with the Commission and are likely to inform decision-making with regard to 2009.

In summary, our problem falls into three parts: mapping, inspection and penalties. That problem has been compounded by a legalistic and slow procedurally based approach by the Commission.

I will now discuss the amount and how we will fund it. Two of the audits — the area aids in 2006 and the entitlements in 2008 — have now worked their way through the Commission processes and have resulted in the publication of a financial correction or disallowance. We have been advised that the Commission is also proposing a disallowance in respect of area aids for the 2007 and 2008 scheme years and in respect of entitlements for the 2008 and 2009 scheme years. To complete the picture as we know it, we have been advised of what may be a €1 million correction in respect of pre-2005 bovine and ovine claims. We are also awaiting the Commission's proposals on the 2009 area aids audit, a compliance audit in 2009 and a rural development audit in 2010.

We are certainly not alone in this. Many paying agencies have experienced disallowance, and the timing of the announcement of disallowance can be highly variable. I know that that is a concern for Members, but the process for determining disallowance has been unpredictably slow. Indeed, although disallowance has been confirmed in relation to various concerns from 2004 to 2007, the Department has, as yet, not had to make an actual payment with regard to disallowance. Members have, understandably, expressed concerns about the impact of those corrections when they eventually arise, but the Department has made careful provision in its accounts to accrue — that is, to treat as already spent — the relevant amounts for disallowances up to and including the 2009 scheme year. That means that the arrival of any of those confirmed disallowances will not impact on the spend of the Department or the Executive in the year in which it eventually materialises. I know that that will reassure Members, but that leaves the important matter of future disallowance.

The timing of the announcement of future disallowance decisions cannot easily be predicted, but it is expected that decisions on area aids in 2007 through to 2009 and on the ovine and bovine schemes will be announced at some point. I will return to the accounting arrangements for that in a moment. First, it is important to note that, although the previous area aid audit that we received was in 2009, we cannot rule out the possibility of further audits for the 2010 and 2011 single farm payment scheme years, and there have been audits on rural development and on cross-compliance where we await feedback from the Commission. It would be unwise for the Department to speculate in advance of those audits what the findings might be or what account the Commission might take of what has already been done. Of course, Members are free to use the figures to date to make such predictions, but, as Minister, I cannot be drawn into that unhelpful discussion. Only last week, officials were involved in lobbying the Commission at a

senior level on disallowance, the programme of work that is under way and the scope that there might be for the Commission to send some positive signal to the paying agency on the progress that we have made so far. I do not want the House to send a message to the Commission that further disallowance might be in order for the North. Of course, there remains a risk of further disallowance, and we are doing all in our power to mitigate that problem.

I now turn to the way in which my Department is managing the disallowance problem to seek to avoid problems for the North. The Department is required to prepare its accounts on what is known as an accruals basis. For disallowance, that means that liabilities are recorded and expenditure is scored in the financial year in which the obligation to pay the disallowance arises, not the year that the payment of the disallowance is made. In other words, the money is treated as being as good as spent as soon as the liability is recorded in the accounts.

I confirm that £69.4 million has been accounted for in my Department's 2009-2010 and 2010-11 audited resource accounts for disallowance covering the single farm payment scheme years up to and including 2009. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has accounted for another £11.2 million of disallowance that relates to the North. That is a total of £80.6 million. DEFRA holds that £11.2 million for us, and the balance has been met at the North of Ireland block level. As a consequence, there will be no further budgetary pressures on either my Department or the block for scheme years up to and including 2009. The funds used to meet the disallowance pressure could not, in the main, have been reallocated by the Executive for other purposes within the block. Finally, I should point out that the EU has not yet sought the cash from us for disallowance, and the payment of that cash will not create any additional pressures.

The moneys that have been accrued are sufficient not only to cover the confirmed disallowances that I mentioned but to take into account disallowances to be confirmed in the future about which we have sufficient certainty now. I will be clear: that comprises the area aids disallowance up to and including 2009, entitlement disallowance up to and including 2007 and the one-off ovine and bovine disallowance. I have provided the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development with a table that attempts to summarise the position at present as accurately and clearly as I can.

The Commission has carried out an audit of our 2009 risk assessment exercise, and, although its initial feedback on how it was carried out was positive, it has not yet finalised its position on the 2009 area aids audit. However, given that the overall risk to the fund was assessed to be 5.19%, it is unlikely that the disallowance imposed for 2009 will be less than the 5% flat rate correction that has been applied in previous years. It is on that basis that the Department has made provision on an accruals basis for that year. The funds used to meet the disallowance pressure could not have been used for other expenditure in the North, so there has been no impact on DARD or other Executive services. The position has been built up over several years. Although that is, I hope, welcome, it remains my top priority to tackle the issues that could cause future disallowance, and it is to that work that I now wish to turn, and I will talk about how we are solving the problem.

12.15 pm

I have said that the problem identified by the Commission is mainly in three areas: mapping, inspection and penalties. I will deal with the last issue first. We have always encouraged and required farmers to claim only for eligible land, and we have repeatedly increased our communication effort. We have evidence that farmers are claiming on less ground overall than in previous years, which seems to signal that ineligible land is being removed from claims. That is positive and reflects the responsible nature of most farmers. In a large population, however, there always will be a small number who turn a blind eye to the rules of the scheme and seek to get away with it. I have a clear message for those farmers: the Department is reviewing its approach to penalties and will, in line with Commission demands, seek to increase its use of intentional penalties when those are justified.

The Department is examining a number of 2010 inspected cases. If, in any of those, intentional overdeclaration is determined, the application of the Commission's penalty framework will mean that no single farm payment will be made for the 2010 scheme year. It is possible that, in some of those cases, that will also affect other years' claims. We will also consider how that impacts on the 2011 inspected cases. Farmers who wilfully claim on land containing bungalows or on scrub will be vulnerable to much higher penalties, so my clear message to farmers is that they should be active and alert to the need to update their maps and claim correctly. It remains the farmer's responsibility to ensure that only eligible land is included in the claim, and, since 2005, we have issued detailed guidance explaining that. Throughout the period for which disallowance has been imposed, my Department has been criticised for being too harsh on farmers, but the Commission has been saying exactly the opposite. Although I will ensure that my Department acts reasonably in these matters, it must be clearly understood that that will be within the context of the EU regulations being fully complied with. I have no other option.

As for inspection, between July 2006 and now, the DARD inspectorate has made significant progress in dealing with areas that were criticised by the auditors, although it is important to emphasise that the discrepancies found by EU auditors were generally very minor. DARD has looked carefully at the areas of concern and engaged with the auditors and the Commission's Joint Research Centre to make improvements in the correct interpretation of the regulations in relation to land eligibility and the correct assessment and measurement of eligible land in the field. Inspectors have received enhanced training and additional support resources, and quality checks have been deployed. The most up-to-date field computer equipment is now used, and inspectors have all the available information relating to the claim, including aerial photographs of the field and its features. Those changes were acknowledged and welcomed by the Commission auditors in their recent visit here.

Our present mapping system is delivering a claim accuracy of between 97% and 98%. It is only when the overdeclaration penalties are added that the risk to the fund rises to over 5%. Although an accuracy level of 97% to 98% may be acceptable in other spheres, it is not in this case, and we have to increase it to around 99.5% if we are to end disallowance on area aids. That means that we have to pay attention to the finest detail, even in very small areas, down

to 0.01 of a hectare and, in some cases, areas smaller even than that.

Last year, my Department embarked on a project to remap all 750,000 agricultural fields here. That project, which is funded through the invest-to-save initiative, has been undertaken in partnership with the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP's) Land and Property Services. As Members will appreciate, it is a huge and complex task, but I am pleased to advise that the first of the maps will issue within days. The initial maps will form part of a test, and the Department will interrupt the map issue as necessary to make corrections and adjustments to the process. It is planned to have all maps with farmers in time to inform their 2012 single application form returns.

The maps are based on all land declared by a farm business on its 2011 single application form; namely, all land owned, leased or taken in conacre. Field boundaries and the ineligible features that we identified and assessed this year are superimposed on aerial photographs. The field boundaries have been determined by Land and Property Services, which is our mapping authority. As Land and Property Services uses accepted mapping standards, it establishes field boundaries on the basis of physical features, for example hedges, fences and walls. Where those do not exist or are not apparent from the aerial photography, field boundaries will change. That will mean that the information shown in those maps may be different from information shown on maps in the past. It also means that, if fields are being used by more than one farmer — for example, on a shared grazing basis — only the boundary of that field will be shown. We will write to any farmers affected in that way to explain the situation and to advise on the action they should take.

Given the importance of this work, it has been decided that we will use the first phase of around 200 to 300 maps issued to test the accuracy of the revisions and to check that our systems are robust enough to deal with any queries that may result. If that test proves successful, the remaining maps will begin to issue during December and through to February 2012. To accompany the maps, we have produced a data table, which provides additional details of the features shown on the map, and an explanatory guidance booklet. Staff will be available in DARD offices to discuss any changes that are required to the maps. For example, changes could be required if something is built in a field after the date of the aerial photograph or if an area of scrub has been removed. It is vital that, once they receive them, farmers check their maps and contact DARD about any changes that are required. Maps will be available to view online after they have been issued to farmers. We plan to extend the online facility in the future to make it more interactive. We will explore, for instance, the scope for farmers to report map changes to us online.

A number of Members stated last week that farmers expect the Department's maps to be correct, and I do not want to mislead farmers in any way. The map will be correct only once the farmer has checked it against what he knows to be the current situation on his farm. If Members make any suggestion to a farmer that he or she should rely on the DARD map without checking it, they are doing that farmer a disservice and putting him or her at risk of penalties. It is not possible to do a mapping exercise of this scale without there being corrections to make, and it is only with the

willing co-operation of the farming community that we will be able to correct the maps to the Commission's satisfaction.

We believe that our current approach will resolve the problems and, importantly, provide an accurate and robust basis for the implementation of CAP reform in 2014. As Members will appreciate, this mapping project is only one element — albeit a major one — of a comprehensive programme of work that is under way in the Department to ensure compliance with the EU regulations.

We continue to develop for both farmers and inspectors. In March this year, we issued the 'Guide to Land Eligibility' booklet, along with an aerial photograph, to all single application claimants for 2010. The booklet clarified many eligibility issues and set out the standards that inspectors now use to assess land eligibility. It builds on a long engagement with the European Commission and the Joint Research Centre in Italy to ensure that we understand as well as we can what the Commission's expectations will be for detailed eligibility rules.

We have introduced new computer software for assessing and processing field information, using global positioning equipment and information databases. Although those developments have initially slowed the progress of inspections, as they become established they will yield considerable benefits in the speed of inspection completion and will enable inspectors to provide a fair and accurate assessment of land eligibility more easily. In addition to the new software, work is under way to introduce technology to allow the use of satellite imagery for some inspections in 2012. That will enable us to check claimed parcels remotely and, in time, should speed up payments significantly. Moreover, that approach will help to ensure increased consistency and standardisation of on-the-spot checks, which the Commission sees as a critical factor when applying the scheme rules.

Since 2005, my Department has provided a facility for farmers to submit their single application electronically — online — and I am pleased to report that there has been a steady year-on-year increase in online applications. This year, the number of online applications has risen to 5,880, which is around 15.5% of all single applications received in 2011. The online facility for the single application is an important customer service initiative, offering farmers and my Department significant benefits. My Department continues to work closely with industry stakeholders and representatives to refine and improve the service further. We will seek to ensure that their valuable feedback is taken into account in its future design and operation. I encourage all farmers to use the service and, if they have not yet registered, to do so now in readiness for next year's scheme. The online facility is available around the clock throughout the application period. It is easy to use, automatically checks many aspects of the claim as information is entered by the farmer and, as stated, has associated online benefits, such as access to maps and aerial photography. By submitting their applications online, farmers can reduce the potential for error when completing their claim forms and thus avoid potential delays at a later stage.

As part of my Department's commitment to engage with the Commission, we gave an undertaking early this year to carry out, in line with a Commission guideline, a voluntary audit of random inspection cases from 2011. The audit, which

the Audit Office is undertaking, has commenced, and a report will be submitted to the Commission by 1 September 2012. The report will present evidence gained during the audit on whether the amounts found eligible for payments as established by DARD, recorded in its databases and paid are free from material misstatements and on whether the control statistics reported to the Commission are correctly compiled and reconciled to the database by DARD and are free from material misstatements. It is hoped that a satisfactory report will provide assurance to the Commission that the corrective actions being undertaken by DARD are effective. That could reduce the risk to EU funds and, in doing so, reduce any further disallowance that may be applied. In addition, on 10 November, the DARD permanent secretary met the deputy director of DG Agri in the European Commission to update him and his colleagues on the programme of work that is currently being undertaken in DARD. The meeting went well, and the Commission was encouraged by the actions that we are taking.

In September 2010, the Department lodged a case with the European Court that challenged the approach used by the Commission when it applied the 2006 disallowance. It involves a very technical matter concerning the interpretation of EU regulations on how overdeclaration penalties should be calculated. We await the court's considerations on the matter. If successful, we expect a substantial reduction in our disallowance, although the exact amount would be dependent on the detail of the court's judgement. In the meantime, the Commission continues to follow its processes. Should our case be successful, however, it will have to reconsider the position regarding the disallowance that was applied in that year and others.

DARD, in recognition of the need to take a disciplined and co-ordinated approach to this work and as part of its governance arrangements, has set up an EU audit compliance programme board. The board will ensure the effective progressing of a range of projects, some of which I have mentioned. It is designed to ensure compliance with Commission audit recommendations. The programme reports directly to the change management board, which is chaired by the head of the paying agency.

I hope that that comprehensive account provides the who, when and where asked for during last week's debate. I have provided an accurate account of the confirmed and proposed disallowance. I have highlighted the importance of the maps, and I reiterate that it is essential that we get help from farmers to make those as accurate as possible. Although we will make a lot of progress during the next few months, it will not be a perfect process; nor will it be painless. Farmers will, in some cases, be unhappy with the maps that they receive, and work will be required to correct them. The Department will be challenged in regard to its payment timelines. However, in working through that together, we will be able to demonstrate very significant progress towards having a stable set of data in our land parcel identification system (LPIS).

We are working with all parties, including the farming unions, farmers and the Commission, to resolve as many of the issues as we can. I appreciate the support given by those parties, my Executive colleagues and Members of the Assembly, particularly the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. It is only by recognising the issues and working together to resolve them that we will satisfy the

Commission that our controls are effective and that this level of scrutiny and disallowance is no longer required.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for her statement. I am glad that she recognises the work of the Committee on this issue. I am sure that her officials examined carefully the debate that we had last week on the Committee's motion.

Does the Minister agree that, whereas the Committee's motion sought clarity on the extent of the fines and disallowances, the position is far from clear? Will she accept that we are not really that much wiser as a result of her statement? Very little or nothing was said about the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, and there was no detail whatsoever on the disallowance or penalty fines issue.

In September 2010, in the House, the Minister's predecessor, who is from the same party, promised actions to minimise disallowance by bringing in new measures and through negotiations with the Commission. If the Department is continuing to calculate fines or disallowances at a rate of £15 million or £18 million year on year, does the Minister not agree that that suggests that the new measures have been ineffective or have not been brought in at all and that the Department's negotiation with the Commission has borne no fruit whatsoever? The most important issue is how that will impact on the current wave of farm inspections for single farm payments. The Department has been notoriously slow up to this date.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I do not agree. I think that I tried my best in that very lengthy statement to clarify the position around the fines and the disallowance. I have clearly said that it is £80.6 million, £69 million of which has been accrued in the accounts and £11 million of which DEFRA holds. I cannot be any clearer about that; that is the figure that is being audited. It is on the Department's accounts; it is clear for everybody to see.

I will pick up on the Comptroller and Auditor General and the issue of irregularity, which you raised during the debate last week. The Department is well aware of its obligations to me and the Assembly. The Comptroller and Auditor General has qualified his audit opinion of the Department's 2009-2010 resource accounts. In his opinion, the amounts that are due to be paid to the EU in respect of financial correction are irregular. I respect the right of the Comptroller and Auditor General to inform his opinion on the treatment of items in the accounts. However, I argue that the expenditure is not irregular. The view has been noted in the Department's annual reports and accounts. Again, those are open for anybody to view.

The concept of regularity is set out in 'Managing Public Money'. Expenditure is regarded as being irregular if it falls outside the legal powers of the Department, Assembly consents or DFP delegations. I know that that sounds very technical but that is the reality. The Department believes that the European Communities Act 1972 and the Assembly budgeting and Estimates process provide the requisite authority and consents to ensure that the liabilities are within the Department's delegated authority. That is why we disagree with the Comptroller and Auditor General when it comes to regularity or irregularity.

12.30 pm

As to the difference on the ground, we envisage that we will start our regular process of issuing payments. Our target is to have 80% issued by December, and, at this stage, we are still on track to move forward with that. Again, 95% is the target for June, and that is a regular year-on-year issue.

As for what has been done to date, action has been taken. We took a three-pronged approach, and the legal challenge is still ongoing. We do not know what the outcome of that will be, but if we are successful, that will bring down the disallowance. Securing that would be a win. Remapping is a massive piece of work and will not be done overnight. It has taken some time to get that right, but I will issue the new maps over the next few days.

So, there has been action over the past number of years. We have to be mindful and put the whole thing in context. The Commission's process for dealing with disallowance is so slow. There were four full years between its first audit and its official confirmation that there would be disallowance. That is the process that we are dealing with and that makes things challenging for the Department. The Department initially entered into a process of conciliation with the Commission, and it went on for three full years. You have to deal with very long processes in Europe. However, we are on target to improve things and to introduce the new mapping system; that was the main concern of the Commission. So long as we are able to address that and communicate that message, we hope to be able to bring down any potential future disallowance.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Who is to blame for the disallowance issue? Is it the Department, the Commission, farmers or a combination of all those stakeholders?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. It would be simplistic to blame one party for the disallowance but that is not to say that the various parties are not at fault. In relation to the Department's responsibilities, I preface my response by saying that some of the issues are very technical. The Department had issues with the maps that it issued, the Commission delayed the whole process and operated a system that made everything a lot slower and harder to deal with and then some farmers claimed for ineligible land — it was only some farmers; the majority of farmers are responsible and claim appropriately.

I am not running away from blame, but you need to look at the matter in the round. All three of those areas need to be considered. Our job is to work with farmers to ensure that the maps are fit for purpose, to continue to communicate with the Commission, and to move forward with LPIS and our remapping process so that we can bring down any future disallowance.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her immediate answer because I was slightly worried. I read the 58 points in her statement and I can see where the Commission and the farmers fell down but I cannot see where the blame goes back to the Department. That is something that has to be recognised, Minister; the Department was majorly at fault for the delivery of this system. Your statement emphasises:

"discrepancies found by EU auditors were generally very minor."

If your Department has made very minor errors that led you to accrue £80.6 million of disallowance, I would hate to have seen what would have happened had your Department made major errors.

Your statement outlines your intention to use satellite imagery for some inspections in 2012, which will enable remote inspections. Does that also mean that farmers can expect remote penalties as well? Your Department will move to meet the perception already out there that it is a Department solely based in ivory towers in Belfast and one that has no interaction with the farming or rural communities. Your Department needs to address that in order to deal with some of those problems and get out on the ground —

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

Mr Swann: You have to encourage your Department to get out on the ground to work with the farmers who it is meant to support.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I have not for one minute tried to escape from or take the Department out of any blame situation. The Department's maps were not fit for purpose. That was identified by the Commission. At the time, the Department felt that the maps were correct. It thought that it had a good case and could make a challenge. With the benefit of hindsight, it could have moved more quickly and went to a remapping system. However, hindsight is a wonderful thing. At the time, it thought that it could genuinely challenge Europe. The fact that we took on the court case and took legal advice on it shows that we thought that it would be successful.

My departmental officials are very much out on the ground with farmers. We work with the farming unions. I was recently out and met all the policy heads of the farming unions' various groups. We will continue to do that.

No one person can fix this. DARD will have to issue the new maps. Only in partnership with the farmer can we get them up to standard and be sure that they are correct. You have to remember that the maps that were issued back in 2005 and 2006 led to compliance rates of 97% to 98%. The Commission wants a 99.5% compliance rate. That is what we are working to address, and I hope that we can do that. We will issue the new maps in the next few days and get things moving. By 2013, we hope to be in the position that we have a fit-for-purpose, 100% ready-to-go mapping system.

Mrs D Kelly: I refer to the statement made to the House by the Minister's predecessor and party colleague this time last year. Minister Gildernew said that it was:

"wrong to simplistically blame the Commission" —
[Official Report, Bound Volume 55, p225, col 2].

for what has happened. That remains the case, despite the scattering of blame to the Commission.

We obtained figures on the disallowance in the South of Ireland. Last week, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development met a Committee from the Oireachtas, and there is a 5% disallowance. Members need to realise that part is disallowance and part is fine. Yet, with the UK, the

figure is 49% as a total of the area disallowance. Those are approximate figures. In the North, per head of population, we are being asked to repay or to pay a fine that is 20% of the UK total fine, with only 2.9% —

Mr Speaker: I am being very patient with Members. Let us try to come to the question.

Mrs D Kelly: It is on this basis, Mr Speaker. If the percentage of the total UK population that lives here is 2.9%, but the fine and disallowance is 20%, what is the Minister doing or what reassurance can she give to the people of the North that we will not be disproportionately fined for the ineptitude of her Department's use of its resources and the decision of the Commission?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The first point that I want to make is around disallowance in general. We were the first area to be out of the traps, if you like. We are first in the queue to be dealt with. The fines from Europe have increased dramatically over the past four or five years. We are not alone in facing fines. Many paying agencies right across Europe are grappling with disallowance for similar reasons. The most recent Commission decision affecting us announced our fine to be just over £4 million and also announced that 13 other countries were to be fined.

The disallowance for the South of Ireland has not been confirmed yet. There has been no definite confirmation. It is the same with many member states, and we need to be mindful of that. We might be facing this issue now but we are being dealt with first.

As to reducing the disallowance: that is what the whole remapping process and talking to the Commission regularly is about. We are trying to bring down the figure for the future. We have been fined up until 2009. We know what the correct figures are and about the £80.6 million. That is everything dealt with until 2009. For the future, if we cannot stop the disallowance, we are trying to at least bring it down. We have so many systems in place to try to improve things.

Mr McCarthy: Last week, I referred to this as a debacle and said that it is outrageous and shocking that the Department will have to pay up to £100 million in disallowance fees. The Minister referred to £64 million that has been accounted for in her Department's resource budget. She then went on to say that there would be no impact on DARD or other Executive services. I do not know, but £64 million in anyone's language is very valuable and will have some effect on some Department in the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Minister also said that the single farm payment was first introduced in 2005, and the Commission's auditors came in 2006 and found fault with the controls operating by the —

Mr Speaker: Again, I encourage the Member to come to the question.

Mr McCarthy: Of course, Mr Speaker. That was your Department, Minister. Why in heaven's name did no one catch on to that in 2006? That would have prevented so much money from going out of the Northern Ireland block grant. Also, can she confirm that this will be the last fine? I understand that more fines are coming down the track for inefficiency with regard to horse mussels in Strangford Lough. It goes on and on and on. Where will it stop?

Mr Speaker: I think that the Minister has the gist of the questions.

Mrs O'Neill: So many questions.

Let me make it very clear that the figure is £80.6 million for everything up until 2009. I cannot comment on future disallowance. We are arguing with the Commission and putting our case about what we are doing to improve things. Hopefully, that will bring the disallowance down if we cannot stop it. The Member asked where the money is coming from. As I said, £11 million is being held in DEFRA and the rest is being dealt with through underspend at block level. That has been made possible by utilising underspends at the overall block level. It is money that emerged after the financial year end and, therefore, could not be spent in other Departments. I make that point clear.

In respect of Strangford Lough, I am disappointed that the Ulster Wildlife Trust has decided to take its case and provoke the European Commission to take action against us. We have a plan in place, namely the modiolus restoration plan. We have worked very carefully with the industry to get that and allocated £1 million to fund a research programme. We are doing a lot of good work on that. It is up to the Ulster Wildlife Trust if it wants to take a case to the Commission. We will communicate with the Commission on that issue but we have a good plan in place for modiolus restoration in Strangford. We will have to deal with it as time goes on.

Mr Irwin: I declare an interest in that I receive a single farm payment. Contrary to some press coverage, farmers, in the main, did nothing wrong. Some press coverage stated that farmers were guilty of wrongdoing, but most of the discrepancies were very minor. In the Minister's statement, she said that with the benefit of hindsight, it was clear that her Department should have sought to comply sooner. Is it not an indictment of her Department that it did not seek to comply sooner?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said earlier, with the benefit of hindsight, action could have been taken more quickly. However, I want to put it in context so that everyone understands.

The first audit was in 2006. Negotiations with the Commission about what could be done to improve things started straight away, and DARD told the Commission that it thought that the maps were fit for purpose. The process of exchanges with Europe is lengthy, difficult and cumbersome. The negotiations went on until 2008, when the Commission officially told DARD that it would face 5% disallowance. At that stage, the Department entered into a formal conciliation process, which went on right up until 2009. Just before the 2009 date, the Department entered into a legal challenge. It thought that there was a strong case to take against Europe and it took legal advice. The conciliation process ended in April 2009. It took until January 2010 for Europe to inform the Department officially that it was pursuing the 5% disallowance. It did not publish or sign off on that disallowance until July 2010; that was the first confirmed date of disallowance.

Looking back, I ask whether the Department could have moved sooner to remap. With the benefit of hindsight, the Department could have moved sooner. However, we have to deal with the situation that we are in now. As soon as the issue was highlighted in 2008 and it looked as though the

Commission would not accept that our maps were fit for purpose, the then Minister, Michelle Gildernew, directed the Department towards a remapping process. We now have to challenge the Commission on future disallowance.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive statement. It seems that the benefit of hindsight would have made us all wiser and meant less of a dilemma with an entire issue that does no one any favours or credit. There seems to have been an inordinate amount of time in which to get the mapping issue right between DARD accepting that it would have to remap rather than contesting the issue and the present time. Can the Minister explain why that has taken so long? What assurances can we have that it will be expedited as quickly as possible?

12.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. There are several reasons why the maps cannot be prepared quickly. The first reason is that the work is highly technical, enormously complex and detailed. As I said in the statement, a long engagement with the European Commission's joint research centre in Italy was necessary to clarify some of the issues concerning vegetation, including, for example, the treatment of various kinds of hedges.

Ultimately, the new maps will have to meet stringent quality standards set for all paying agencies in the EU. The changes to be introduced have to be delivered, and, at the same time, we must seek to continue to deliver farmer payments. At all times, a compromise has to be struck between the introduction of change and the delivery of ongoing programmes. We are going to do our utmost to ensure that the balance struck is the right one, but there is no guarantee that the introduction of the new maps will not bring significant challenges in the next two years.

It is a high priority for me to ensure that payments are made promptly. It is also a high priority for me to tackle disallowance. From time to time, there will be tensions between those two priorities. Furthermore, the outworkings of the Commission's audit processes and the process of confirming disallowance progresses slowly and within certain timing.

As I said earlier, one of the biggest challenges that we face is dealing with the Commission and getting things moving. If the Commission comes out with a new announcement around various issues that it highlights, it can disrupt the hard work that is ongoing, as occurred recently with the long-awaited Commission announcement on a disallowance that the Department had accrued some time ago. Therefore, it is important to remember that the Commission did not officially confirm disallowance until 2010, and the Department then finally decided that the disallowance and current map upgrade needed to progress as quickly as possible. I am committed to making sure that we complete that process by 2013. A test number of maps will be issued in the next few days, and we hope to have a better, more fit-for-purpose system for the Commission to approve for 2013.

Mr T Clarke: I also thank the Minister for her statement. Given that your Department has been the paymaster of the system since it was inherited in 2006, and even by some of the admissions about how it could have acted sooner, it seems that it has been defending the indefensible in

how it has interpreted some of the programme. Even in the statement, reference was made to two farmers claiming the same portions of land. Therefore, it seems that there has been a catalogue of errors in her Department. There will be change for farmers in relation to maps and other aspects, given all the errors in the past, but what changes will the Minister make to the personnel in her Department who sat over those errors for the past five years and tried to defend the indefensible?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. We have trained our inspectors and increased technology, so we are hoping that that will assist the farmers in getting the whole system and the maps fit for purpose. Officials will continue to work with farmers, and we will also work with the farming unions to make sure that we get it right. As I said earlier, the benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing, but there is no doubt that when the issue was highlighted to Michelle Gildernew in 2008, she took action, and she showed good leadership and good stewardship of the Department in making sure that things changed.

We have increased the number of inspectors, we have upskilled them, and we have new technology. We are moving towards a new mapping system, so we are moving in the right direction, and, hopefully, we will get there by 2013, and we will militate further against any disallowance.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive statement. Does she agree that the problem has centred on mapping, inspection and penalties? Given that mapping is the root of the problem, can the Minister assure the House that a dedicated team in the Department will work alongside Land and Property Services to make sure that the maps are correct, and that when the farmer makes an application for the single farm payment, he will be working honestly on a good map, given that some mistakes have been made in the past? Can the inspection be more of an advisory service to farmers rather than a penalty service?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. The maps that are issued are not perfect. That is the message that I want farmers to take away, and I want Members to take that away if they are speaking to farmers. The maps that we issue will not be perfect until the farmer gets involved in the process and takes a look at what is on the map. They are the most up-to-date maps that the Department has, and, with aerial photography, they are improved maps, but we still need farmers' input to make the maps fit for purpose and proper, so that they can make a correct claim for a single farm payment for the next year.

My Department will continue to work with our inspectors to make sure that we get a fit-for-purpose system. We have had to upskill our inspectors. We have got them new technology, which will help them to do their job. Hopefully, that will improve the two-way process between the inspector and the farmer. DARD is not out to hinder farmers in doing what they do. We want to assist them and make sure that we get the process right so that we do not face any future fines.

Mr Allister: I want to take the Minister back to paragraph 27 of her written statement and the remarkable pretence that the £69 million that has had to be found has been without any pain to the Northern Ireland economy. It is patently obvious that it was block grant money and that, if it was not being deliberately held over to end-of-year underspend, it

would have been recycled during in-year monitoring. Is it not the case that the wheeze was worked in such a way as to enable the Minister to say that it caused no pain, when, in fact, £69 million was held back from other plans on which it could have been spent during in-year monitoring? Why are we pretending that it is otherwise?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is incorrect. The £69 million that was found from the block underspend was money that was identified at the end of the financial year. It could not be distributed across the Departments. The money was underspend that would have been lost back to the British Treasury, and the Department was able to utilise it to deal with the fines.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for her statement. I am dismayed that such a huge amount of money has had to come from the Northern Ireland taxpayer. Many of the questions, Minister, were about how you were going to raise the money. Does the Minister accept a suggestion that she could, perhaps, raise the money by charging £50 to everyone who wishes to ask her a question in future? *[Laughter.]*

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. May I confirm for the Member that the money has been accrued in the accounts, so we do not need any additional money at this time? If we face any future disallowance, we will have to deal with that at the time. The £80.6 million has been accrued at this stage.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her statement. The public perception is that farmers are to blame for the situation. Will the Minister make a commitment to change that perception and to return her Department to one that will be a friend of the farming business across Northern Ireland: one on which the farmer can depend for accurate mapping and sound advice and from which it will receive good and timely communication on their responsibilities? Furthermore, can the Minister advise the House what the final legal bill is expected to be?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Department wishes to be the farmers' friend; I think that we make every effort to play that role. The Member mentioned the perception that farmers are to blame. I said very clearly said that some farmers made ineligible claims, because the majority of farmers made eligible claims for land that they felt was within the scheme rules.

It will cost £150,000 to take the case. If we are successful in bringing down all those levels of disallowance, it will be a great achievement. If we are able to do that, it will be money well spent. It is also important that we challenge these decisions with Europe, because you cannot merely roll over and accept these things all the time. It is important that you challenge decisions, where you think you have a legal case to work on. We sought legal advice and felt that that was the way forward.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas, agus seo í an cheist atá agam uirthi. Has the Minister sought any advice from the Department of Finance on the use of public moneys in this matter? If so, can she say what that advice was and whether her Department is working within DFP rules in dealing with public moneys in that respect?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The underspend is dealt with by DFP centrally; that is how we were able to secure that to deal with the disallowance issue. DFP has been very involved in the process.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. I draw Members' attention to my declaration of interest as a recipient of a very modest single farm payment who is looking forward to it arriving soon. In paragraph 53 of her statement, the Minister said that she is appointing a new board to look at the issue and that it will be chaired by the head of the paying agency.

Is that an appropriate individual to chair the review, and is that good governance?

Mrs O'Neill: In paragraph 53, I talk about how we need to take a disciplined and co-ordinated approach. It is important to tie down all the EU regulations that we have to comply with, and we must ensure that the Department is doing that. We need to report directly to the head of the paying agency, because that person will have to deal with Europe and, ultimately, be accountable for all the payments. Therefore, that is the appropriate mechanism.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for her statement. I declare an interest as someone who gets an even more modest single farm payment than Mr McCallister. Does she accept that the ineptitude of her Department has resulted in many more farm inspections and, to ensure that they maintain their single farm payment, farmers are required to cut back their hedges very significantly and cut down trees, which ruins the natural habitat for wildlife and destroys our environment?

Mrs O'Neill: DARD carries out its inspections in compliance with EU regulations, and that is what we have to work to. I am not interested in doing any more than is necessary. We just have to comply with the EU regulations, and those are the confines that we work within. Inspectors are not out to hurt or damage farmers. They want to ensure that we can tell Europe that we are complying and, therefore, we can continue to draw down single farm payments, rural development money and whatever other funding we can draw down from Europe.

Private Members' Business

Rivers

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

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of the Environment and their Executive colleagues to develop a co-ordinated strategy to improve how rivers are cleaned.

I thank the Business Committee for allotting time to allow me to raise this issue. I thank the Minister for her presence and, in advance, I thank her for her response. After having spent the guts of an hour on a multimillion pound payback of funds to the European Union, the cleanliness of Northern Ireland's rivers will come as something of a light relief. I also thank Mr Kinahan for tabling the amendment that has been selected. I found Mr Kinahan a useful source of counsel in advance of the debate. He and I have shared concerns about the issue, and his amendment enhances the motion. I did not think that it would be possible to enhance my motion, but it does that. It achieves that lofty ambition.

I am not prone to bringing motions to the Floor to criticise Ministers or Departments. What I want to do with this motion — what I always try to do with anything that I have brought forward for debate — is to highlight a problem that I have experienced in my constituency work and encourage a resolution. I know that I am not the only one who has experienced this problem. I am trying to impress on the Minister and her Executive colleagues the need for greater interconnectedness between various public agencies, not just Departments, in respect of the cleanliness of Northern Ireland's rivers.

I do not need to point out that Northern Ireland is fortunate in that it is blessed to have many great rivers that offer fantastic scenery, have great tourism potential and, in many cases, are a source of world-class recreation. However, given the nature of the debate, I have a sense that many Members may point out how particularly wonderful the rivers in their constituency are. Nevertheless, the status of those rivers is often put in jeopardy. Sadly, all too often, our news bulletins are filled with stories about the pollution of rivers and, in some instances, the cases are quite severe.

That is not the thrust of what I want to say today. However, it is a problem, and I share the concern of many others, including the Minister.

1.00 pm

What I do want to discuss is my experience of one particular river, the Enler river in Comber. That river might not trip off the tongue as an example of one of the best rivers in Northern Ireland. However, it is recognised as a fantastic place for recreational angling, particularly for sea trout and

brown trout, and, given its nature, the river is a real test of an angler's skill. On a good day, particularly in the summer, the banks of the Enler are full of anglers enjoying their sport, but sometimes those who go there will get more than they bargained for and will see something in the river that they did not expect to see.

I have seen everything in that river from the ubiquitous shopping trolley, which, unfortunately, seems to inhabit quite a lot of rivers in Northern Ireland, to prams — I think that everyone has seen prams or parts of prams in rivers — to, more commonly, trees. I have also seen dead animals in the Enler and, most recently, part of a fridge-freezer. I do not know how some of those things get into the Enler — I can hazard a guess — but it seems miraculous how some of the debris makes it into the river. What also concerns me is that other bits of litter often collect around that debris. We could get into a whole debate about littering, but that litter, although it sometimes looks as though it did, does not fall from the sky, and the everyday detritus of drinks bottles and fast-food wrappers accumulate in and around the other debris.

When I first encountered such a case, I naively thought that it was a fairly easy, simple and straightforward problem to resolve. In actual fact, it was anything but. Anyone who is faced with such a problem would instinctively think of the Rivers Agency as the place to go to to solve it. Its name is sort of a clue — it is like the advert on television, in that the name says it all. One would think that the Rivers Agency would be bound to be able to help with such a problem, but, sadly, I have always found it, through no fault of its own because of the way in which the responsibilities are structured, to be the least helpful organisation when it comes to clearing up rivers. It is part of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), but, as I was told in a recent reply from the agency, when it comes to our rivers, it is concerned only with the drainage function of the watercourse and has no remit to carry out works that improve the aesthetics, such as litter-picking. That reply is what motivated me to table the motion. The agency is structured in that way under the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973. I appreciate and understand that, but it is part of the problem that I want to try to overcome through the motion.

There is something inherently wrong when an agency that is called the Rivers Agency and that is charged with looking after Northern Ireland's rivers has no concern about aesthetics. The aesthetics are every bit as important, yet the Rivers Agency is concerned only when, for example, a tree, shopping trolley, pram or part of a fridge-freezer blocks the flow of the river and has a flooding effect. I will set that aside, and I am sure that other Members will bring up the fact that the debris in the river, even if it is not blocking the flow, can cause flooding at a later date and can determine where a river floods. Perhaps the Rivers Agency needs to have a broader interpretation of its remit and should be more concerned about rivers. There is something wrong when an agency that is called the Rivers Agency has no concerns about the cleanliness of our rivers. If the litter that I talked about is not preventing the flow of a river and is not a threat to flooding, the Rivers Agency is, in effect, not interested. When, for example, a tree is blocking the flow of a river, the Rivers Agency will send out men to remove it, and I have seen that happen. However, it has no responsibility for, or concern about, any litter or detritus that may have accumulated as the result of the fallen tree. That is wrong, and there is a lack of connectedness.

In my experience, what inevitably happens is that the Rivers Agency points you in the direction of a local council and highlights the fact that councils have discretionary powers to deal with such circumstances. In most cases, councils are concerned enough about the appearance of their rivers, want to take a bit of public pride in them and will want to step in. I have seen examples of local councils stepping in and taking action, but, equally, I have seen examples of their not being willing to do so.

It is a bit like other problems that we have experienced, particularly last winter, when councils did not want to rush in to deal with snow and ice on footpaths. Councils have a concern about health and safety, insurance, liability and taking on such liability in the future. One local authority responded to a query from me by stating, "Look, we will lift it if it is easily lifted, but if it is difficult or potentially dangerous, we are not interested". We get this background game going on of what I would describe as public sector ping-pong: Rivers Agency hits the issue to the local council, the local council hits it back to Rivers Agency and it goes back and forward. Indeed, when cases are raised with the Environment Agency, it points you to the council as well.

So, there does not seem to be a clear understanding between all of those agencies as to who exactly is responsible. Invariably, the reality is that it falls upon some of the organisations that Mr Kinahan talks about in his amendment; it falls on community groups to step in, perhaps with the assistance of organisations such as Tidy NI and Conservation Volunteers, to do that work themselves. In my locality, I have even seen the local angling club organise work parties regularly to step in to clean the river through the year.

That is all very well and good and to be encouraged. Perhaps that is a manifestation of the big society in Northern Ireland. However, with the greatest respect to all those who give freely and voluntarily of their time, that approach cannot deal with those one-off occasions when a tree falls or a fridge-freezer door, pram or shopping trolley is in a river. They cannot deal with that. They can try to but will not always succeed, so that is where help, encouragement and support are needed from the public sector.

Northern Ireland needs a more co-ordinated and coherent joined-up strategy on dealing with the cleanliness of its rivers on an ongoing basis and particularly in response to the sort of problems that I highlighted. I appreciate that there is not one Department to do that. The Minister is here to respond on behalf of her Department and the Executive. Yes, her Department has a responsibility, but, through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and on behalf of local government, the Department of the Environment (DOE) does as well. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for angling, which has a clear interest in all of this. The Department for Social Development (DSD) has, perhaps, an interest through volunteering. There is hardly a Department or an aspect of government that is not affected.

We should be deeply proud of our rivers. I am proud of those in my constituency, and I am sure that other Members are proud of the rivers in their constituencies. However, I think that the message that sometimes goes out from government is that it is not as proud of those rivers

as it ought to be. When we identify problems of lack of interconnectivity, as we see here —

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

Mr Hamilton: — we cannot simply wash our hands, if you excuse the pun, of that problem. We should say, "Now, let us tie this together much better than is the case".

Mr Kinahan: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "improve" and insert:

"the management of our rivers so that they are kept to the highest levels of cleanliness; and further calls on the Executive to ensure that the expertise and services of non-governmental organisations and stakeholders are part of that management arrangement."

I, too, very much welcome the chance to speak in the debate today. As many of you know, I am extremely keen on trying to help the environment, particularly rivers, so I was pleased to see Mr Hamilton table the motion. I am equally pleased to see the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, because, most of the times that we have discussed rivers, it has been in the context of the Department of the Environment. As can be seen in the amendment, I am extremely keen to see Departments work closely together.

I had never heard of the Enler river before the debate, so we learn from each other as we get buried in worlds of our own rivers. However, it was good to hear that the same things that happen in my patch happen in other Members' patches — it is the anglers and the local community who get involved in clearing rivers, whether of tyres, trees, unsavoury domestic items or even the fridge that somehow floats down the river to a resting place. We have the same problems in south Antrim, whether it is the Sixmilewater, which was polluted two or three years ago and about which we have had many debates, or the Ballymartin river. Recently, we even had a pile of cat litter from fuel laundering dumped in the Sixmilewater, and we could not get it moved out of the river for exactly the reasons that Mr Hamilton raised. Everyone denied that it was their job, and eventually the fishermen pulled it out, only to be told that they should not have done so because it was hazardous waste. The fact is that we needed to find a way of dealing with it very quickly.

The public need to know who is responsible. It confuses them to find out that the Rivers Agency is not responsible for all that they would expect. Therefore, my amendment on behalf of the party asks for more joined-up government, not just at departmental but at council level. I welcome the fact that Mr Hamilton's motion also puts forward that point.

However, we need someone to take it on. We need someone who will actually make sure that joined-up government works. Could it be somebody from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) who pulls it all together? Could it be a junior Minister, or, in line with our party policy, could we merge Departments to try to get everything to do with rivers into one Department? I think that that is very much the way that we should be looking in the future.

My amendment tries to move on from how a river is cleaned and expand that to management of rivers, so that they are cleaner and we are managing their cleanliness. I want to emphasise water cleanliness. In the UK's National

Ecosystem Assessment document that has just come out, put together by some 70 scientists, we are told that the benefit of water quality to Northern Ireland is between £8 million and £12 million. We are also told that 98% of our water that is used for human use is extracted from rivers, lakes and reservoirs — 98%. The comparison across the water is 35%. We are also told that the chemical status of our rivers is just a bit better than it used to be, and that their biological status has hardly changed.

Think of the use of our rivers: the eel fishery in Lough Neagh used to bring in £5 million, and its turnover is now down to £2 million. Aquaculture brings in £11 million. Look at the whole fishing industry: rivers are phenomenally important to us. Some 95,706 hectares are in lakes, rivers or bogs. It is incredibly important that we get the Departments working together today, especially if you think of all that we spoke about last week in the Programme for Government and the strategies going forward for development and jobs. We need to find the balance with the environment, and we need to have both working together.

My amendment is not just about cleanliness; it is about joined-up government. It is not just about Departments; it is about Departments and councils. It is also about stakeholders and the other experts and the other users. I used to sit on the Lough Neagh committee. We had academia; we had the users like the anglers or the quarries with their gravel extraction; and we had the farmers. I praise all of those who work hard to help on the rivers. There are also the river trusts, like the Sixmilewater Trust, which I have to declare an interest in.

I praise all those anglers and all those trusts, because it is they who really do clean the rivers. They look at the rivers throughout the year and are there on the ground all the time. It is those anglers who have put in the spawning beds, reported the banks and much of the pollution, and helped to pull it all together. The same applies to the river trusts and their enthusiasts, whether it is wildlife, countryside or tourism. For those who listened to me a week or two ago in the Sixmilewater pollution debate, one matter that I really wanted to push was the anglers' monitoring initiative. It shows how people look after the cleanliness of the river. It is an idea that is used across the water, where all those who are qualified, if we get them qualified, can sample the rivers, see how clean the water is and report it upwards. When two or three poor samples are found, they can pass it on to the NIEA, which can then bring in the necessary enforcement.

I go back to the point that we must have joined-up government. We must stop passing the buck between one Department and another. As Mr Hamilton said, no more ping-pong. I ask the Minister to set up some joint form of government, some way of pulling it all together so that we have one person or some grouping responsible. We need to look at some reorganisation, some consultation and some way of working with the experts.

We know that DARD is responsible for the Rivers Agency. I can only congratulate the Rivers Agency on almost everything that I have worked with it on and seen happening on my patch — until you get to the point about sharing responsibility, when quite often, "It's not my job", and it is passed on.

In the environment, we need to make sure that planning and its effects on rivers are controlled. Planning has very good enforcement officers, but not enough resources. Think of houses that have been built on floodplains or near rivers. Something is going wrong when, as has happened on the Milltown Road in Randalstown, a house gets flooded every time the river rises, not just during big floods. Other houses have been built above it, and now everything drains into the house that is lower down. We need to get that sort of point into the joined-up thinking in order to get planning and enforcement from the Department of the Environment working with the Rivers Agency. They do it a bit, but they could do it that much better.

1.15 pm

When it comes to DCAL, we need to see not only the licensing and regulation of fisheries, but Rivers Agency being encouraged to work and share responsibility with the other Departments, so that it is no longer just the flow that it is concerned with but all the things that block the flow. On one stretch near me, there are three trees in the centre of the river. In the old days, it would have been the owner's responsibility because he owned to the middle of the river. Nowadays, they are left lying there. Antrim suffered from flooding three years ago because trees and large items blocked watercourses and caused the water to go somewhere else, which then flooded houses all around the area. That is why we need joined-up management.

Do not forget the councils; they have biodiversity officers and the wish to clean and look after their own patches. However, they need resources, and someone needs to pull it all together. Therefore, I propose the amendment. We want to see rivers managed to the highest levels of cleanliness. We want to see joined-up government, and we want to see stakeholders and experts being included. I ask the Minister to add fishermen and river trusts to all consultations and to look for other such bodies that need to be included.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I will speak, first, in my capacity as Committee Chair before expressing some personal views, if I have time.

It is not surprising that we have a motion such as this before us, because, from what I and my colleagues have read and heard in Committee on several occasions, the fact that there are so-called shared responsibilities for rivers is a cause of much confusion, consternation and frustration. The Committee has been trying to get to grips with who is responsible for what, and it commissioned a research paper on the role, function and responsibilities of the Rivers Agency as recently as last month. Mr Speaker, you can see that the Committee is on top of the issue.

The first thing that struck me when I read the research paper was that the Rivers Agency's powers are discretionary rather than mandatory. Probably more worrying was that the second thing that struck me was that, although the Rivers Agency has responsibility for some issues, and the Minister summarised them recently as prevention, protection and preparedness, there are many issues that do not fall under its responsibility. Therein lies the problem.

As far as I understand the situation, the agency is responsible for maintaining the free flow of designated water courses and has some more limited responsibilities

in respect of undesignated water courses. Apparently, the Rivers Agency fulfils its responsibilities through a programme of inspections, and as it has limited powers with respect to removing obstructions it takes certain actions in that regard. The agency also has flood defence responsibilities and regulates water levels on Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. It also has regulatory powers for the safety of reservoirs and obligations for emergency responses in relation to flood alleviation.

Who else in the public sector has responsibility? The answer is: the Northern Ireland Drainage Council, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and local councils, not to mention the Planning Service, Roads Service, NI Water and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. By my calculation, responsibilities are spread across at least four Departments: the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure; the Department of the Environment; the Department for Regional Development; and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. If there were ever an example of the need for joined-up government, this is it.

I know that many, if not all, members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development have had occasion to raise constituency issues with the agency, and I know that some of those have spilled over into Committee business, which I have tried to resist. However, the simple truth is that we have found it very difficult, as individual MLAs, to get any clarity or success from Rivers Agency. I will clarify that because, had this debate been taking place last year, I would have been saying that I found Rivers Agency to be atrocious to work with. However, I must admit that over the past number of months — whether it is because it is in my capacity as Committee Chair to change things — there has been a marked difference in how I am being treated, as an individual MLA, by Rivers Agency on constituency issues.

I do not know whether that is so much to do with position; it may be down to individuals in different offices in the Rivers Agency. If you get the right person, who is proactive and wants to deal with the issue, you get better results. Even when it is not their responsibility, that individual will make it their task to find out who is responsible for the work that is needed. So I must say that I have seen a marked improvement in the Rivers Agency over the past number of months. Of course, that is not enough. We understand that the Rivers Agency has difficulties with its criteria and what its responsibilities are.

I will speak briefly as an MLA representing North Antrim. I grew up in the Kellswater river, wisely or unwisely; perhaps my parents were not wise for letting me be in the river every day in the summer months. I know exactly how rivers do and do not work. We can rest assured that, when there are issues with and objects in a river, that is of concern to the communities who live in the areas in question because of not only the optics but the danger of flooding.

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

Mr Frew: It is very important that that is dealt with, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House. Indeed, I think that this is a motion that should unite the Assembly.

Where rivers are concerned, who is responsible for what is very complex. We can say that the Rivers Agency is responsible, but the Environment Agency, and so forth, are also involved. One other Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), also has a responsibility. The Planning Service also has a responsibility, because it falls to it to make those who are applying for planning permission for houses aware of whether they are or are not on a floodplain. In some cases, you wonder whether that information is given to Members.

Councils also have a role to play. If you look at the Rivers Agency, you will see that, if an impediment is not stopping the flow of water, that body, quite rightly, no longer has responsibility for it. Therefore, the matter goes back to the councils, which have a discretionary responsibility. A council directive states that, due to cost and health and safety issues, they try to avoid sending staff out to a river for fear of drowning.

How do we expect those who are responsible for polluting rivers to clean them if they are landowners or operators? I will put this to the Assembly: one of the failings here is that we do not have a complete list of all those who are responsible for our rivers and loughs. I will go back to one landowner — the Crown Estate. It has responsibility for rivers and loughs in Northern Ireland, but we do not even have a list of which rivers and loughs it is responsible for. There is The Honourable The Irish Society, lords and so forth, as well as absentee landlords, who derive large amounts of money from fishing rights and aggregates from the loughs. They have a responsibility for the maintenance of the rivers. If we are to look at this issue, we must have everybody around the table.

One possible way to look at this matter is to get all the stakeholders to discuss the merits of having one body that is responsible for rivers. We cannot be selective about those that we think are responsible. There are bodies out there that we know are irresponsible but keep falling through the net. I think that those people will have to be brought to the fore and told of their responsibilities. Believe it or not, some people who have responsibility for rivers are still covered by Crown immunity and cannot be taken to court. That is wrong, and if we are going to look at the issue, that needs to be changed.

We talked about reviews of all the rivers. I have sympathy with everything that the other Members who spoke said. The issue goes back to 1962 and was raised again in 1984, 1992 and 2004, when the direct rule Minister was, I think, Lord Rooker. He said that what was in place here was sufficient and that he was not minded to change it. Given what came from that direct rule Minister at the time, how are we supposed to change that?

We have to take a proactive approach. If we give the responsibility for river cleaning back to councils, there will be money involved. Can they afford to take on that responsibility? I do not think so. I think that we have to get everybody here round the table. We must have a comprehensive review. I keep going back to this point: we have to get everybody here round the table.

There are other issues involved as well. When we talk about designated watercourses, we have to realise that maybe only a 200-yard stretch of a river is designated, and therein lies the problem. The reason why quite a lot of the rivers

concerned are causing flooding at the minute is that drains are blocked or gullies are blocked by trees. So we must get somebody to remove such blockages.

I certainly support the amendment, which is very comprehensive, and I do not have a problem with the motion. Nevertheless, I think that we have to get everybody round the table.

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

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the fact that the proposer of the motion accepts the amendment, and I agree with him that it improves the motion. At the outset, I have to point out that we are, once again, starting another week in the absence of Executive business other than the Minister's statement. I think that that is absolutely disgraceful. The facts about river cleaning are well known. There is already a plethora of recommendations about it. The issue is whether those recommendations will be acted on and whether a better form of joined-up government will be the outcome. That is the decision before the Executive.

Members here find themselves in the unenviable position of having to discuss strategies and, sometimes, rehash motions that have been before the House on previous occasions, even in the last mandate. That is a sorry state of affairs. Youth unemployment is at its highest ever level. One in five young people in the North is unemployed or has no training place. Over the weekend and, I think, today, small retailers have made a plea to the Executive asking them to do something to help their lot. However, we have not seen any business here that will do that, and we have not had any suggestions from the Executive, so it seems that they do not think that it is imperative that that be delivered. No doubt we will come back to that at another time. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: I appreciate that the river cleaning strategy requires joined-up effort. It is, indeed, an important topic for those whose homes have been flooded, which is a dreadful experience, after a river has burst its banks. It is regrettable to note, however, that Rivers Agency costs some £11 million but that only £4 million of its budget is spent on its flood defence programmes and on protecting villages and housing developments.

Members who spoke previously were right to point out that responsibility for river cleaning falls to a number of Departments, and that is where it has fallen down. Joined-up working is essential in ensuring that rivers run freely. Indeed, to protect local people and communities, there is a need for better information and better education of the public about what Rivers Agency and Departments are responsible for. The Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development Committee said that he had found Rivers Agency to be, until recent months, one of the most difficult agencies to deal with. As someone who has over 17 years' experience as a local councillor and some seven years' experience as an MLA, I, too, found that to be the case. I am not talking about the person at grass roots level who, if you got to know them, was very helpful. However, the further up the line you went, the more elusive the people were and the harder it was to ascertain who was responsible for what.

I do not have much more to add. I lend our party's support to the motion but find it regrettable that we are speaking again today about cleaning rivers when much more pressing issues face the people whom we represent.

1.30 pm

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I congratulate my fellow Environment Committee members Mr Hamilton and Lord Morrow on tabling the motion calling for a river cleaning strategy.

As Members can imagine, the subject of rivers crops up frequently in the Environment Committee. Only a few weeks ago, the Committee was informed that, unlike the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which has recently announced an allocation of £110 million towards implementing its river management plans in England and Wales, the Department of the Environment is struggling to stretch out a mere £500,000 to do the same thing in Northern Ireland. The Department informed us that, to do that, it would be implementing Northern Ireland's river basin management plans through local management area action plans because it had been unsuccessful in its recent bid for £8.9 million.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes, surely.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Member agree with me that, had the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development not been fined £80 million, which went back to the European Commission, some of that money could have been diverted to help the Environment Committee to ensure that the work was provided for?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Lo: Very well said; I certainly agree with that. Well done.

The Department was unsuccessful in the bid for £8.9 million, which it says that it requires to implement river basin management plans here. Although my following comment may not be directly related to today's motion, and as members of the Committee recognise, issues relating to rivers simply cannot be taken in isolation, yet that is exactly what we do.

The last time that we discussed rivers in the Environment Committee, members wanted to ask questions about water quality and river habitats, so we wrote to the Department of the Environment for more information. Members also wanted to know more about problems with small urban streams, which meant that we had to write to DARD because management of water flow is the responsibility of the Rivers Agency. Had members also wanted to ask about fishing in rivers, we would have had to approach a third Department, DCAL, as it has responsibility for inland fisheries. Three different Departments look after three aspects of river management, and there is still no clear indication of where responsibility for cleaning rivers lies.

In addition to that complexity of river management at central government level, we have the involvement of local councils. Although the Committee has not engaged with councils specifically on rivers, it has been liaising with them and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on fly-tipping. Towards the end of the last mandate, the previous Environment

Committee scrutinised the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill, which made provisions to give councils more powers to deal with fly-tipping. The Committee was adamant that those powers must not be enacted until the Environment Agency and councils had reached agreement on a suitable threshold below which councils would deal with fly-tipped waste and above which it would become the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

As my fellow Committee members are aware, that threshold has not yet been agreed. The outworking of that is — as representatives, I am sure that we all have some experience of it — that the two authorities are playing off against each other about which authority has responsibility to address a fly-tipping problem.

It is exactly the same with our rivers. Responsibility is divided among so many authorities that it is easy for them to opt out when funds are tight. The frustration that that causes for citizens and for us as their representatives when we try to act on their behalf is why we are having this debate. I am in no doubt that a strategy clarifying responsibility for keeping the rivers clean would help to alleviate those problems.

Rivers are an integral part of our landscape. They not only make Northern Ireland a lovely place to live but contribute to our economy through tourism, the creation of livelihoods and the provision of leisure services. They will not do that if we do not keep them clean, so not only do we have a duty to protect them but it makes common sense. On behalf of the Committee for the Environment, I support the motion and the amendment.

I will now speak very briefly as a Member for South Belfast.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Lo: I have the same frustration in trying to identify the authority to clean up prams and trolleys in the River Lagan, and a joined-up strategy is needed.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the debate, and I thank the Members who brought the motion and the amendment to the House. The amendment adds to the motion and was tabled with the best intentions. I support the motion and the amendment.

The cleansing of rivers impacts on all of us, and, as elected representatives, the general public probably turn to us first and expect us to resolve the situation of litter in rivers. Litter comes from many different sources, including domestic, industrial and agricultural. Plastic is probably the worst type of litter, because it damages not only the habitat but the animals that live in it. There is a broad range of waste, including plastic, paper and animal carcasses. You always hear people asking why a sheep carcass has not been taken out of the river, and the discussion goes round and round and ends up in the media, and there is no clear understanding of who is responsible for taking it out. The public want a collective response, where someone takes a decision to take the likes of an animal carcass out of a river and sorts out who will foot the bill later. Some agency should take responsibility for the removal of the animal.

Tourism is one of our biggest growth sectors, and, when visitors see litter in our rivers and along our riverbanks, they are appalled. They do not see whose responsibility it is.

They probably see it as the responsibility of this House to solve the problem of litter in the river. The visual aspect is a big issue for visitors when they decide whether to return for a second visit. I visited Albania for a day, and the beaches were absolutely filthy. I have nothing against Albania, but I said to myself, "I will not be going back there". That is the type of impression that litter in rivers leaves on visitors.

I agree with Oliver McMullan that there is a range of interests and stakeholders. The Crown Estate, absentee landlords and councils have a huge responsibility. The community is probably ahead of us in taking action. People have been out with fishing clubs and have improved their areas. I have been on community clean-ups, and, when people get involved, it helps to form a sense of community. A joined-up approach to who will cleanse the rivers is required. There should be round-table discussions on the issue, and, under the review of public administration, the lead agency should be the councils.

I am coming at this from the clean neighbourhoods legislation, which is there to enable them to do it. The only thing missing is resources; therefore Departments need to pool their resources. We heard discussion about DCAL, the DOE and the Department of Agriculture. We need to sit down and look at how much money we can make available to local authorities to carry out some of those measures.

I understand the public's frustration. Even as elected representatives, you are on a merry-go-round, passed from pillar to post about who has responsibility for clearing litter out of a river. The build-up of litter is the biggest issue that faces elected representatives; a branch in a river could collect a lot of litter around it. That becomes a flooding issue, but it is a case of trying to convince the Rivers Agency that it is a big enough obstruction for it to remove.

It is important that agencies work together. I had a situation when the Forest Service and the Rivers Agency could not decide which was responsible for a branch across a bridge in Donard Demesne, Newcastle. I had to ask the Minister for a decision. That should not be happening. The issue should be dealt with and then see who foots the bill.

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

Mr W Clarke: I support the motion.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Members who tabled the motion, as the cleaning of rivers around the Province, including those in my constituency, has been a source of concern for many. Through my work in the Newry and Armagh constituency, I am aware that the lack of cleaning of a river in Laurelvale was, in my opinion, the direct cause of flooding to homes at Velton Lawns, much to the residents' displeasure. In that instance, branches and debris blocked a main culvert running under the roadway, which resulted in water backing up and the river breaking its banks, causing significant damage and disruption.

Since then, however, following my sustained lobbying, the Rivers Agency carried out remedial works to install a box culvert and a twin filtering grille system to catch debris further upstream and prevent further flooding. Fortunately, through an increased monitoring programme, we have had no further incidents of flooding. However, my lobbying of the Rivers Agency and, indeed, the Minister, on the matter continues to get the riverbanks walled at that location to

prevent further erosion of gardens. However, had more frequent monitoring and cleaning been in place prior to the incident, flooding might not have occurred in the first place and residents' homes would have been spared severe damage.

Last week, I met landowners close to the shores of Lough Neagh with my colleague Sydney Anderson, MLA, to hear their concerns about the Derryneskan, Foymore and Derrylettiff watercourses. We discussed the possibility that poor river maintenance is leading to an increase in the flooding of farms in the area, which in turn prevented grass from being harvested and is damaging to vegetable crops. I requested that the Rivers Agency come before the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and it will be interesting to put those concerns to the agency and to hear how it has managed that watercourse and what it intends to do to alleviate concerns.

Those are only two issues; I could report on many others throughout the constituency and beyond. However, it is clear that although good work is being done there is room for improvement. I would like to see greater action on issues before problems mount up and cause greater nuisance for landowners and homeowners. We need to see watercourses cleaned more regularly and maintained to a greater level. That would improve the situation environmentally and prevent damage to land, produce and property. I support the motion.

Mr Swann: I thank Mr Hamilton for acknowledging how our amendment strengthens the motion. I also thank all the other parties and everybody else who spoke in support of the amendment because it moves the debate away from just how rivers are cleaned to whether government use other NGOs' skills and expertise to keep bodies of water in good condition. Hopefully, through this motion we can get more support and recognition for those stakeholders — farmers, local conservation groups, angling clubs and all the organisations that make physical use of the rivers.

1.45 pm

Although a substantial proportion of Northern Ireland water bodies in each of the three river-basin districts are already classed as being of good status or better, a number of areas, such as Lough Neagh and the tributaries that surround it, have some of the most polluted waters in Europe. More can and should be done in those areas. Following on from what some Members said, and after working with it recently on a number of issues in my constituency, I commend the Rivers Agency.

Mrs Overend: Does the Member agree that there is a requirement for the Rivers Agency to work with landowners and to carry out any work or repairs in a timely manner so that it is not to the detriment of farming activity, whether that is through the use of the land along the river, the safety of animals or the avoidance of land erosion?

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

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I thank the Member for her intervention. It is timely to tie in the Rivers Agency with the Agriculture Minister here, because it is important for us to recognise the work of the Rivers Agency and the timely way in which it has been doing that work. However, with more resources and a better joined-up approach among other Departments, we can get a better response from other parts of government.

The Member mentioned farmers. We have to realise that farms cover 70% of the total land mass of Northern Ireland. Therefore, farmers have a major role to play in the protection and maintenance of rivers. It is also important to note that, given the large numbers of farms here, there are very few associated incidents of pollution connected directly to farmers. It is important that, as one of the major stakeholders in the area that we are talking about, farmers are considered as quite effective custodians of Northern Ireland's rivers. Through the countryside management scheme, rivers are protected, but many farmers are already taking proactive measures to protect the rivers that flow through their land, because they realise that they add value to the natural resources and can encourage more use of those rivers through angling, recreation and tourism.

Further stakeholders that should be taken into consideration in the motion are the angling clubs, which are prepared to take responsibility for stretches of river when it comes to the numbers of fish, for example. A number of angling clubs in my constituency of North Antrim have already approached me to see how they can take forward that work. So, there is a proactive approach for the stakeholders to take on responsibility for the use of the rivers.

One thing that we should be mindful of in this motion is the impact of the water framework directive, which already has a requirement for stakeholder participation in the management of the water environment. That was part of the rationale behind our amendment: it meant that we were coming here with substance behind what we were proposing.

Recently, the Ulster Unionist Party publicly expressed concern that Northern Ireland is not on track to meet the 2015 target of the water framework directive. We are halfway through the six-year term, and there has been very little action to date, even though the water framework directive is a DOE matter. Taking into consideration the fact that we are not meeting our targets in the directive, even though it is a DOE matter, will the Minister take part in a joined-up approach to it? In a statement to this House, Minister Attwood has already warned of tighter controls coming from Europe. More challenging, not only in this debate, given what is coming from Europe and the Minister and the stakeholders, will the Minister inform us how she is going to —

Mr Boylan: Does the Member agree that if directives come from Europe, the resources to deal with resulting issues should come with them?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his intervention and agree with him. If we are to meet those framework directives, we should receive direct support. That is a very timely intervention.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that it is also very important that we structure our organisations better to get the maximum output from the money that we are putting in already, as has been suggested?

Mr Swann: I thank everybody for their interventions. *[Interruption.]* No; you are all right. We have realised from the broad scope of the debate the number of agencies that are responsible for our rivers and waterways. If we are serious about getting money from Europe to go forward with a joined-up case, we need to be sound in what we are doing

here to make sure that we have a joined-up approach and that we are delivering on the same aims at all times.

I was about to finish before that intervention. Minister, when you address the concerns that I have raised —

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

Mr Swann: Thank you, Speaker. When you address the concerns that have been raised with the Minister of the Environment about framework —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Swann: — I hope that you can come up with some answers that will keep Mr Oliver McMullan happy as well.

Mr Dallat: I join with others in welcoming this motion. One of my greatest childhood pleasures was to go to a local stream, take off my socks and shoes and, armed with a jam pot, catch the sticklebacks. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Frew: The situation is your fault. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Dallat: I doubt that you could do that today.

Some reference was made to Albania and the dirty beaches. I have been to that country, and I saw that it spent its money on 700,000 bunkers. We had our bunkers as well, but there is no excuse for the lack of investment in the management and cleaning of our rivers. Those of us who bothered to take any interest in the Budget will know that the money has not been allocated. Indeed, there was a daft idea that the £16 million that is required over the next four years would be raised from the sale of plastic bags. The same plastic bags —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: Of course.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for raising that point. I had planned to raise it myself. The Minister seems to have a policy of turning plastic into gold, because he is going to put £12 million into the green new deal from the plastic bag levy. There is also £12 million for water cleaning, but it seems to be the same £12 million each time. Does the Member agree that we can spend £12 million only once?

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

Mr Dallat: I would agree if I could be sure that even that £12 million would be spent. The problem is that there is a total lack of investment in our river management and repairs and so on.

I come from a part of Northern Ireland where rivers are very important for tourism. The legislation that governs the management of the River Bann was set in the 1960s. It is all about drainage and getting water out to the sea, so it has absolutely nothing to do with the modern-day demands on rivers. Tourism is our greatest growth area. The River Bann was, at one stage, our greatest salmon river. In fact, if you had lived a few hundred years ago, you would have found that there was a law that stated that you did not have to eat salmon more than three times a week. If you could catch a salmon in the River Bann now, you would consider yourself very lucky. A few are still there, thank goodness. The fact that the money has not been invested is a sad reflection on

society. Every society likes to think that it leaves something of which it is proud for the next generation. I am afraid that the management of our rivers leaves a lot to be desired.

Several Members have talked about getting the runaround and how you go from the Rivers Agency to the drainage division to the DOE. I would have thought that the easy solution to that is to have one body responsible for our rivers. That is certainly worth considering. Although the motion may be a filler for other things, it is important. I congratulate —

Mr McGlone: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: Yes; of course.

Mr McGlone: The Member made the point that people often get the runaround when they contact the Department. That has particularly been the case when a dead animal has been found in a waterway. I know that that is illegal. You will find real fun in trying to establish someone who will take responsibility for the decaying mass of flesh, which sits there and creates a huge smell. It is really noxious for people. That often occurs in a tourist location, and the matter could move from Rivers Agency to the council and could possibly involve NIEA. It could then go back to the council and then Rivers Agency before the obstruction is cleared.

Mr Dallat: I could not agree more. That type of pollution is serious, and industrial pollution has been responsible for killing tens of thousands of fish. Although penalties have recently been imposed on the worst polluters, it is still a serious problem. I am not an angler, but my heart goes out to those who give of their time and money voluntarily to clean up and restock rivers to find only that somebody with no respect or accountability does away with their work and sets angling back for years to come.

There are many reasons why a river should be cleaned up. Reference was made to flooding, which has been a problem in a large part of my constituency. The other issues that I mentioned — tourism and the environment — are very important.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. As he brings his speech to a close, I hope that he is leading on to the following point. Tourism is important, and community groups and associations are often left to clean up river beds, not only because of flooding issues but because of aesthetics, because no Department will do it. Does the Member think that that is fair, and should that issue once again be the responsibility of Departments?

Mr Dallat: Mr Speaker, I see you smiling, and I know that you are going to tell me that my time is up. I am grateful to the Member for allocating me enough time to agree with him. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go maith raibh agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will start by making some general remarks before picking up on Members' points.

A river cleaning strategy in the North relates to water quantity and quality. Two main pieces of European legislation are associated with that: the EU floods directive deals with quantity, and DARD's Rivers Agency is the competent authority for that; and the EU water framework directive deals with quality,

for which the DOE, through the NIEA, is the competent authority. These two pieces of legislation are often referred to as sister directives and are not mutually exclusive.

A joined-up approach to the strategy is achieved by the participation of staff from the Rivers Agency who sit on both the implementation working group and the steering group for the water framework directive, and by the participation of the NIEA as one of the key stakeholders for the implementation of the floods directive.

Separate, but perhaps more relevant to the motion, is the connected issue of the nuisance suffered by landowners and members of the public alike because of littering and the illegal dumping of animal carcasses in watercourses. The remit for Departments is clear for issues such as littering or fallen animals. It is only when there is an identifiable threat to health or the environment through potential flooding or pollution that either my Rivers Agency or the NIEA can become involved. When there is no identifiable threat, the nuisance value for landowners and the general public still remains, and there is an understandable expectation that the debris or animal carcass will be removed.

In instances when items have been illegally dumped or fly-tipped, the local council has enforcement powers against offenders. However, when an offender cannot be identified, those powers do not extend to the removal of debris or animal carcasses. It may fall to landowners to remove such debris, but their responsibilities, and who would enforce them, appear unclear.

To that end, I would welcome a river cleaning strategy to address the current obvious gap. I have been a local councillor and involved in many such instances in which people are constantly chasing their tail to try to find someone responsible to take on the issue. Being mindful of that, I welcome the motion and think that it is a direction that we need to take.

Willie Clarke picked up on the fact that councils have some enforcement powers, but I hope that the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2011, which comes in next year, will assist us to find a solution on the way forward. The crux of the issues that Members raise today is about who will take responsibility, lead and have control. I agree with Simon Hamilton's comments when he moved the motion that there should be clear responsibility and co-ordination and a strategy that delivers properly and sorts out the issue.

Members said that many Departments and agencies are involved: the Rivers Agency, the Department for Regional Development, DOE, DCAL and other Departments have a role to play. It is about getting everyone together, knocking some heads together and finding a positive solution on the way forward.

2.00pm

Danny Kinahan moved the amendment and said that the responsibility was not just DARD's but the entire Executive's. After the debate, I intend to raise the issue at Executive level and see where we can get to. I have a meeting with the Minister of the Environment this week, and I will raise it there as well.

Paul Frew said that he is getting some favouritism from the Rivers Agency: I hope not. However, I am glad that his dealings with the agency have improved, for whatever reason, in the past number of months. The Rivers Agency works very hard, and, particularly when dealing with recent flooding issues, I have found its staff to be very approachable and easy to work with. I hope that that is all Members' experience.

Oliver McMullan said that we should agree to draw up a list of all agencies responsible, note what they are responsible for and then get some transparency around ownership. Those are the issues that any new group that is set up needs to start off with. It should then move forward by developing a proper strategy. He said that whoever takes responsibility needs to have the proper legislative cover. Many Members picked up on that point throughout the debate. That will be key.

Anna Lo talked about funding problems. All Departments have to compete for a very limited resource budget. My Department, like others, always competes for funds for vital services and will continue to do so.

Willie Irwin spoke about incidents around Laurelvale. He picked up on a particular constituency issue. If he wants to take it up with me or with the Rivers Agency afterwards, we will be happy to look into it.

Robin Swann talked about lobbying the Minister of the Environment. As I said, that is something that I will be doing over the next week. I think that my meeting with him is tomorrow. I am happy to raise the water framework directive and discuss how we can work together to meet the deadlines for implementation. DARD is obviously the competent authority for the floods directive, and I hope that I will have the support of all Ministers in delivering on it.

Tourism was mentioned. We do not want the state of our rivers to impinge on rural tourism. My Department is committed to supporting rural tourism through the rural development programme, and I hope that that support continues to increase.

Issues were raised, and points were well made. I presented to Members the Rivers Agency's current approach to cleaning rivers and distinguished between the two remits of quantity and quality, but I am happy to take the issue to the Executive, as the motion calls for, and explore how we can move forward and address this continuing problem. People should have one point of contact and be able to see a follow-through from it, as opposed to running around chasing their tail. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Beggs: This has been a useful debate. There has been a high degree of unanimity around the Chamber, with everyone recognising that we need to improve, do things better and have a co-ordinated strategy. Most Members also indicated that they supported the amendment that my colleagues Robin Swann and Danny Kinahan tabled and spoke to.

I will concentrate my comments on contributions that referred to issues raised in the amendment. Danny Kinahan indicated that the current system is failing. He highlighted the need to improve and to involve partnership working, which generally brings about an improvement to whatever you are doing in life. A particular example involving cat litter showed how each of the Departments seems to want

to walk away from problems. There are no clear lines of responsibility. In the end, a community and voluntary group had to deal with the problem, only for it to be told that it should not have done so. Presumably, the cat litter, left over from fuel laundering, should have been left lying, polluting the river.

Among other options for improvement, Mr Kinahan indicated that looking at how government might be restructured could be the responsibility of a junior Minister in OFMDFM. More importantly, he suggested restructuring the existing Departments to be more efficient in what they do. He said that 98% of fresh water is used in our water supply, and, therefore, it is very important to us. Interestingly, Northern Ireland Water states that 50% of that water is collected in reservoirs, while 42% is withdrawn from loughs, 10% from rivers and 1% from boreholes. I am glad that it is so high. If it were lower, as it is in England, we might experience what people in London experience. I understand that the water there is recycled seven times before it hits the sea. I am glad that our water comes from our waterways. We must protect the biodiversity etc of our rivers to improve the wildlife. However, another very selfish reason to improve the rivers is that we end up drinking the water. That important point was made.

Mr Kinahan praised local anglers for getting involved in improving the local environment and the river. He suggested that the anglers' monitoring initiative that applies in other parts of the UK should be brought in in Northern Ireland. Volunteers can be another set of eyes and ears for the Department. That process can help to gather evidence and address people who pollute a river earlier. I know from experience that that is a major problem. Joined-up thinking is needed on a range of issues.

I am pleased that Simon Hamilton, who proposed the motion, accepted the amendment, recognising that it is designed to improve things. He illustrated clearly, by sharing his experience involving the Enler river in his locality, the fact that the agencies are not working in a clear fashion and there is a tendency to play ping-pong and pass responsibility back and forward.

Paul Frew, the Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, agreed that there needs to be improvement. He, too, illustrated a complicated situation that involves six agencies — it may be even more — and four, possibly five, Departments. How can you possibly manage something well with such a breakdown? We clearly need to bring about improvement.

Dolores Kelly indicated her support for the amendment. She expressed concern about the Rivers Agency and how it has a difficult remit. I shall go back to what was said earlier: people's expectation of what the Rivers Agency does is very different from its remit. That needs to be cleared up.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, Anna Lo, indicated that funding was a problem, with only £500,000 earmarked to carry out the river basin management plan, when £9 million was bid for. We must do things better and more efficiently ourselves. Let us get our structure right and spend our money right. If we need more money after that, we should chase it then, but let us reorganise and do things better.

Willie Clarke indicated that there was a particular problem with plastics. Having been involved with the marine conservation volunteers, I know that it is largely plastics that are washed up on our beaches. What goes down our rivers ends up on our beaches. We need to bring about improvement.

My colleague Robin Swann highlighted the fact that the water framework directive means that we have to bring about improvement in this area. We have no choice. The sooner we do it ourselves, the better. I support the motion with the amendment.

Lord Morrow: The debate has been interesting but, at times, quite confusing. I never thought that it was as complicated to get a fridge door or a tyre out of a river as it has been portrayed today. Some Members have called for European legislation to deal with it; others were critical of the Executive. Dolores Kelly was critical that there is no legislation to deal with the issue. I automatically thought that it is not often that a member of the SDLP blames another member of her own party for not bringing forward legislation. Do not let anyone think that this is purely an issue for one Department; it is anything but. However, I do not think for a second that we need to run to Europe to get further directives and more legislation —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: I will in a moment or two.

I do not think for a second that we need to run to Europe to get more legislation to deal with a very simple thing. At times, we get carried away in the euphoria of things.

I ask Members to read again the motion and the amendment, which we are quite happy with. The motion clearly states:

"That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of the Environment and their Executive colleagues to develop a co-ordinated strategy to improve how rivers are cleaned."

That sounds quite simple and straightforward, but it seems to me, after listening to some of the debate and discussion around the House, that it just does not get any simpler.

Mr Beggs: It would be interesting if the Member could illustrate who wants more legislation from Europe. The point that was highlighted was that you need to involve stakeholders in order to get better outcomes. By the way, there is a directive, and, if we do not involve stakeholders, we will be fined by Europe. Therefore, we do not want more European legislation. We want to involve stakeholders to bring about better outcomes and avoid fines.

Lord Morrow: We want old tyres, fridges and freezers taken out of our rivers and put where they belong. That is what we are trying to talk about. I listened to Mr Swann. I think he was in Europe at one stage, and he wanted to know what Europe was going to do about the matter. We have had enough interference from Europe in local and internal issues. Let us not invite them in to do more of that. We do not want that.

I did not realise that I had as much in common with Members right around the House. They referred to their childhood days and how they spent them at rivers, fishing. That is exactly how I spent mine. They were not spent on the Riviera; they were spent on rivers around County Tyrone, in

Ballygawley and places like that. As a young lad of seven, eight, nine years of age, I spent my summer holidays fishing and enjoying the simple things in life.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Go ahead. Let us hear you.

Mr McCarthy: Did the Member use jam jars to catch his fish in the rivers, as I did?

Lord Morrow: Believe it or not, I did. They were 2 lb jam pots at that time, and you got the bigger fish into them. I nearly had the fish weighed before I got them out of the river. I am pleased to hear that other Members spent their childhood days in similar ways. What good days they were.

If we want to take this issue forward and see an improvement in how our rivers are managed, looked after and maintained, there has to be some joined-up thinking. Everybody, without exception, highlighted that, and I agree with that. If we achieve nothing as a result of this debate apart from some joined-up thinking in the future, it will have been worthwhile.

The Minister has given an undertaking that she will bring the issue to the Executive, and I welcome that. At least we will see that achieved. However, we want to ensure that our rivers are treated as the important natural asset that they really are. I believe that, very often, that just does not happen. How often have we heard about river pollution? I read that, in the Sixmilewater river, which I have little knowledge of, an estimated 35,000 fish were killed in one serious incident of pollution. That is an awful indictment. It shows the contempt with which our natural resources are often treated. I hope that that will be the last incident that I will hear of in relation to the Sixmilewater river or, indeed, any other river in Northern Ireland. We have some of the best rivers in the whole of Europe, and they compare with other regions of the United Kingdom. However, I do not think that they are treated as such, because I often see the wreckage of cars, tyres and litter. I would like to see the Departments bringing together a cohesive and decisive way of taking that issue forward.

Should we not have a programme in our schools to educate the up-and-coming generation about the importance of our rivers? I would like to see every citizen in Northern Ireland included as a bailiff in a voluntary capacity and knowing exactly what they should do, whom they should phone and whom they should inform if they witness river pollution or any item that might even seem innocuous. There should be no items of a pollutant nature in our rivers.

2.15 pm

I welcome the debate. I am pleased that the motion, together with the amendment, has found universal support across the House. I hope that, as a result of the debate, we will see things taking a different direction, because it has to be said that some of the greatest offenders in river pollution are Departments. In answers to questions that I have submitted recently, I see that fines ranging from £200 to £5,000 have been imposed on Departments. I do not think that there is a big deterrent there, but, previously, there was immunity for agencies and Departments, and they could not be prosecuted. Thankfully, that has changed, and they have to stand up, be identified and go to court to give an account

of their stewardship and say why they have allowed such things to happen.

I thank everyone for their contribution. I thoroughly commend the motion and the amendment to the House. I trust that they will find universal support.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of the Environment and their Executive colleagues to develop a co-ordinated strategy to improve the management of our rivers so that they are kept to the highest levels of cleanliness; and further calls on the Executive to ensure that the expertise and services of non-governmental organisations and stakeholders are part of that management arrangement.

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

The sitting was suspended at 2.17 pm.

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Agriculture: EU Fines

1. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons for her Department accumulating large fines from the EU since 2005 and what action she is taking to prevent any recurrence. (AQO 781/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The detailed reasons for financial corrections imposed by the European Commission were provided in my statement earlier. However, by way of summary, these are a result of a number of European Commission audits of my Department that started in 2006 and continued until 2009. Following those, the Commission raised a number of concerns relating to land eligibility and the award of single farm payment entitlements in 2005.

Despite my Department's efforts to convince the Commission that any discrepancies were small and the corresponding risk to the fund was low, the Commission subsequently applied flat-rate corrections for land eligibility issues to the 2005 and 2006 scheme years and are proposing disallowance for the 2007 and 2008 years. In addition, in relation to entitlements issues, they applied disallowance for the 2005, 2006 and 2007 scheme years and are proposing disallowance in respect of the 2008 and 2009 scheme years.

To prevent recurrence, my Department, as I outlined earlier, has taken and continues to take steps to mitigate future possible disallowance. The main priority is to improve our mapping system, and we aim to have a stable mapping system in place in advance of the CAP reform process. That task has been challenging, but its first phase is well under way, and revised maps will start to issue within days. We have improved the on-the-spot inspections through the training of inspectors and the use of up-to-date equipment. We also plan to use control with remote sensing technology — satellite imagery — in the 2012 scheme year. We continue to improve our online facility. We have engaged with the Commission through a risk assessment exercise, and we are implementing the Commission's voluntary guidelines on legality and regularity. Through all those and other actions, we hope to satisfy the Commission's concerns and, in doing so, mitigate the risk of future or further disallowance.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for her response and apologise for having her repeat what she told us this morning. However, when my question was submitted, I was not aware that there would be a statement on the same matter. With the potential for the Department to receive further fines from the EU in respect of Strangford lough

horse mussels, will the Minister confirm what progress she has made on that issue?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Because it is not content with the modiolus restoration plan that the Department has issued, the Ulster Wildlife Trust has approached the Commission and asked it to be involved in the Strangford situation. That plan was brought about and devised in conjunction with the Department of the Environment and stakeholders. We have invested £1 million in the plan, which is about further preserving the future potential of Strangford and its mussels. The Wildlife Trust is acting within its rights. We will continue to liaise with the Commission to let it know that we have plans in place. It is aware of that; we have sent our plan to the Commission for it to look at. At this stage, I am not aware of any potential for disallowance as a result of that, but we will continue to talk to the Commission.

Mrs D Kelly: I am aware that the Minister answered questions earlier, but she will be aware of the change in farmland topography over the past few years. What evidence does your Department require when administering the single farm payment, and what evidence must be produced if you are to penalise individual farmers?

Mrs O'Neill: Any penalties imposed will be a result of inspections and non-compliance. For example, action would have to be taken against a farmer who deliberately claimed for ineligible land. The degree of penalty depends on what has happened, so it is decided case by case. Under EU regulations, we have to carry out inspections. We must comply to show that we are monitoring claims made by our farmers. Inspectors do not go out with the intention of trying to uncover something that a farmer is doing, but, if they come across it, we have to deal with it. Europe is getting stronger on penalties and wants member states and areas to look more closely at penalties and take them forward as a disincentive. My Department will decide everything on a case-by-case basis.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister spoke on this issue this morning, as she said, and gave assurances that the payments to date had not affected front line services. I ask her for that reassurance and to continue in that vein, so that if there are further disallowance payments they will not affect front line services.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his question. As I said earlier, the total fines up to 2009 are £80.6 million, of which £11 million has been found in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the remaining £69 million in underspent money that would have been lost back to the British Treasury if we had not been able to utilise it in this way. It is my intention to ensure that we reduce future disallowance as much as possible. We will do that by communicating with the Commission, letting it know about our remapping system and continuing to talk to it about the processes that we have undertaken to improve systems. Hopefully, that will satisfy the Commission and take any disallowance down to the smallest amount possible.

Mr McCarthy: Hopefully we can get some substantial reduction in the disallowance through the European Court. Will the Minister divert some of that funding to, for instance, save the horse mussels in Strangford lough? Also, as we

heard this morning, the Department of the Environment is looking for £9 million to continue work on the cleaning of river basins. Can that money be diverted if we get it?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. If we were successful in our court challenge and were able to secure a reduced disallowance, that would be a matter for the Executive as a whole to consider at that time. It would not be just for my Department to reallocate it where I want. Obviously, every Department has competing priorities, and we have a reduced budget as a result of the Tory cuts. We have to work within those confines at this stage. It is not for me to say how I would distribute the money; it would be an Executive decision.

Forestry

2. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to improve on achieving the targets for forestry cover in the next three years. (AQO 782/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to announce that Forest Service will review the support arrangements for private planting with the objective of increasing the rate of woodland creation. I recently met forestry stakeholders to discuss ways of increasing the rate of planting. They brought ideas including the scope for planting to alleviate flooding risks, greater equality of rates between lowland and less-favoured areas and improving the financial encouragement for farmers and landowners to take part in planting programmes. I hope that the outcome of this work will assist in delivering higher rates of planting over the period of the next rural development programme and help us achieve our long-term aim of increasing woodland cover across the North from 6% to 12% of land area, as expressed in the forestry strategy.

The review will take account of the recently published European Commission proposals in the rural development regulation, which include forestry measures, and will report in time to feed into the new rural development programme.

Mr Lynch: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she provide details of any plans to strengthen North/South links in relation to forestry?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am pleased to confirm that Forest Service in the North and Coillte in the South co-operate on many aspects of forestry. In order to formalise those relations and develop them further, a memorandum of understanding between the two organisations was launched in March. That will help to maximise the potential for development of the forestry sector on an all-island basis, including socio-economic benefits, while protecting the environment. Forest Service in the North is also in regular contact with colleagues in the South on forestry plant health matters.

Mr Frew: I hear what the Minister says and thank her for her answers. However, Forest Service has set extremely low targets for tree planting, especially in the private sector, which reflects a poor image for the prospects for forestry in Northern Ireland. It also means that, if there was significant demand out there for forestry, the money would not be there

to fund it. Will the Minister look at her targets again in order to increase them?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am convinced of the need to increase our targets and to increase planting. We have had many challenges, not least the definition of farmer that Europe applies and how you can grant aid certain people. There are many challenges, and we have taken many actions to increase planting rates. The figure was up to 30% in November 2009, so we are moving in the right direction. However, we need to do more to encourage more people to get involved. At my recent meeting with stakeholders, they came forward with some really good ideas on how we can do that. I am happy to look at that, and I have announced a review to take a step back, see what we can do to encourage more planting and make sure that the incentives are there to encourage that.

Mr D Bradley: Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire cad é mar a chuirfidh sí aidhm fhorógra a páirtí i bhfeidhm: is é sin, an clúdach foraoise a mhéadú faoi dhó. How does the Minister intend to achieve the stated aim of her party's manifesto, which is to double the area of forestry in the North of Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As I said, I am convinced of the benefits of increased woodland to wider society. I will continue to support that and my party's position on it through the forestry strategy. The fact that I have said that the targets are not being met and have asked the Department to fully review the situation shows my commitment to improving this and to moving forward, making sure that we increase planting, whether through incentives to get more people to consider planting. I am very committed to my party's position, and I think that I have shown that in my past five months in office.

Potato Producers

3. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance her Department can provide to potato producers affected by the recent adverse wet weather conditions. (AQO 783/11-15)

5. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what impact the recent period of flooding has had on potato producers. (AQO 785/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 5 together.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) sympathises with farmers who are experiencing delayed harvesting of crops due to the recent adverse weather. I also appreciate the additional work and expense that growers will incur to ensure late-harvested crops affected by localised flood damage are conditioned correctly to ensure safe storage. The Executive face very significant financial pressures in the present economic climate, and there are currently no financial support measures available to farmers to minimise losses due to the recent severe weather, including localised flooding. Any potential for compensation funding is further severely constrained by business case requirements and compliance with restrictive EU state aid rules.

Farm incomes fluctuate from year to year for a range of reasons, including changes in supply and demand, the cost of production and weather events, and it is therefore important that farmers act to mitigate potential risks impacting on their business as far as possible. In respect of risks associated with flooding, farmers are encouraged to consider appropriate measures such as precautionary activity around best practice, investment and insurance provision.

The Department has provided and will continue to provide practical information and advice to help to mitigate the risks associated with severe weather. In addition, my Department has commissioned research into additional measures that farmers can take to mitigate the risk associated with extreme weather events, and the findings of this research will be disseminated to farmers through CAFRE when they become available.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has outlined departmental sympathy for farmers in respect of the recent exceptionally bad weather. As she has outlined, she is aware that the crop has failed for many farmers. However, rather than just restating internal and European difficulties, will she endeavour to establish whether there is any possibility of assistance to farmers whose crops have been devastated due to the earlier despicable weather that caused severe problems and the almost total wipeout of the potato crop?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that in the past, following exceptional flooding in August 2008, the Executive were able to find a small pot of money — I think it was £500,000 — to secure compensation for the loss of cereal, vegetable and potato crops. Given the current economic climate, it will be very difficult to locate that type of money again. Also, you are confined by EU state rules. You have to be careful about the projects and compensation programmes that you take forward. My Department is doing what it can to provide advice. We have commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) study, which we will present in mid-summer 2012. The Department is doing what it can to work with farmers to mitigate the effects as far as possible. However, there is a limited pool of money, and there are many competing priorities in the Executive.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. This is not the first time that we have had problems with potatoes. In recent years, the flooding in August 2008 and the very harsh weather on unharvested crops in late December 2009 and early January 2010 caused problems. Her Department likes to call itself the rural champion, so we need to see action. Could she detail why she accepts the case for flooding in urban areas but not in rural areas, particularly where potato farmers are concerned?

2.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, my Department has taken forward work on many areas, particularly on advice issues, and it has been working with the farming community on mitigating risks. We commissioned the AFBI study on the effects of weather, and, again, we have worked with farmers on mitigating risks.

Where compensation is concerned, as you know, there is a limited pool of money. The Executive have many competing priorities, and this will be considered in the round with all those. I think that I am the rural champion; I will continue to

be a rural champion and to work with the farming community to do all that I can. However, we have to be careful with EU rules about state aid. Flooding in people's homes is one issue, and crop damage, which is, effectively, damage to people's businesses, is a separate matter. I do not think that you can link them and say that one is more deserving than the other. Some of the issues that we need to look at are to do with farmers making sure that they have adequate insurance to cover this type of event. I am always happy to work with farmers to give advice on what my Department can do.

Mr Dallat: Given that much of the crop has been lost through flooding and it is not practical to put a thatched roof over the fields, has the Minister made any representation to the large supermarkets to ensure that farmers will at least get a fair price for their crops?

Mrs O'Neill: I had a meeting recently with Sainsbury's, and I intend to meet the other major supermarkets. When we get to the stage at which we have a supermarkets' ombudsman, that will be a good help to farmers. Obviously, that will not be the case at this stage, but it will be a help for the future. We need that ombudsman to have proper teeth so that we can make sure that farmers at every level of the process are protected and get a fair price for their product.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister satisfied with the progress that has been made to date on the recommendations of the Fermanagh flooding task force?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Obviously, the Fermanagh flooding task force was a cross-departmental body. However, my Department is responsible for two of the task force's key recommendations. The first is about the management of the Erne system. The Rivers Agency is continuing to work with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) to examine options for improving the operational regime, which will reduce flood risk. That detailed work is due for completion in the next financial year. If changes to the existing regime are recommended, a full consultation will be needed to ensure that all stakeholders have their views heard and an opportunity to influence any changes. The second key recommendation relates to the consideration of options for a flood alleviation scheme at Derrychara Link. Having considered the situation, the Roads Service and the Rivers Agency have co-operated closely to provide a pump system at Derrychara Link in the event of high lough levels. The Rivers Agency has also completed work on the Killynure lough drain to help further to contain flows.

In addition to those two key recommendations, the Rivers Agency assisted with the production of a leaflet for the Lough Erne system. That leaflet provided information on preparing for a flood. So, we continue to progress the recommendations of part of the multi-agency working group that Fermanagh District Council established to co-ordinate the progress of the flooding task force's recommendations, thereby enabling more efficient information sharing and consequently bringing about an effective approach to the reduction of future flooding in the Erne system. That working group produced a report in April 2011 against which we have to keep measuring progress.

Mr Allister: The Minister expressed sympathy, but sympathy does not really cut it. Under this Executive, all that we have

had throughout all the poor weather is half a million pounds of aid back in 2008. She hides behind EU rules about state aid, but even in that she is not doing all that she can. That is because there are de minimis rules that would allow the payment of up to €7,500 for each farmer —

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

Mr Allister: — without EU approval. Why is she not taking even that step, and why has she not sought to bring, through representations, the farming sector into line with the rest of the business sector, which can be given aid de minimis of up to €200,000?

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of de minimis rules; I do not need the Member to tell me about them. I will be mindful of that when we consider our approach to the issue. There is a limited Budget, and the Executive have many competing priorities. If you want me to keep repeating that, I will.

The fact is that my Department is doing all that it can to assist the potato growers and all those who have been affected by exceptional flooding. In the past, when the Executive were able to help, they did, and I am sure that, when they are able to help in the future, they will.

Single Farm Payments: Inspections

4. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many single farm payment on-farm inspections have been carried out up to 1 November and how many are still to be undertaken. (AQO 784/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Up until 1 November, 1,090 single farm payment on-farm inspections had been carried out. As required by EU regulations, 810 inspections remained to be carried out at that date.

Mr Irwin: Given that single farm payments are due to go out in a few weeks' time, does the Minister accept that it is just not good enough that around 40% of inspections have yet to be carried out?

Mrs O'Neill: I expect all inspections to be in progress by mid-December. However, some inspections might require follow-up in the new year. Eighty per cent of single farm payments are on target to go out in December, and 95% of them will have gone out by next June. Those are targets that I set, and we are working hard to meet them. As I said, I am fully confident that those payments will be commenced in December and that at least 80% of them will be paid out then. We are working hard with farmers to make sure that inspections are carried out as quickly as possible to allow us to get payments out in our target time.

Mr Swann: For many farmers and farm families, the single farm payment is the major component of their household income. The delays that have dogged it over recent years have, therefore, had a huge impact on the families concerned and on their cash flow. I accept that, under EU legislation, DARD has to finalise verification checks before it can make payments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr Swann: Will the Minister detail what she and her officials regard as the ideal timescale and the realistic timescale for carrying out on-farm inspections?

Mrs O'Neill: Inspections have taken a little longer than normal this year because of all the changes to the mapping system. Things were held up slightly as we worked through that process. As I say, we hope to have all inspections commenced by mid-December. I absolutely agree with you: without the single farm payment, a lot of our farmers would be in the red. They need that subsidy to continue producing. Without it, they simply could not make any money at all. Food security is a massive issue for us.

As regards the timescale for inspections, the new technology and the fact that our inspectors have been upskilled will speed up the process and hopefully allow us to feed information directly from on-site visits to the Department. Payments will, therefore, get out even quicker in future.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. In the Minister's answer, she explained the difficulties that had come about as result of the mapping issue. Is there any possibility of introducing some flexibility with the payments to farmers, particularly where it is well known and established that there is no history of disputes or difficulties with their farms or maps?

Mrs O'Neill: We have our targets, and we intend to meet them. Under EU regulations, I am permitted to make single farm payments only when all the checks have been completed and everything has been done. However, we have found that other countries pay out some single farm payments in the absence of all the checks being completed, and my Department is actively looking at that.

Flooding: Beragh, County Tyrone

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to prevent a recurrence of the flooding in Beragh, County Tyrone. (AQO 786/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I sympathise with all the people across the North who have been affected by the recent flooding. I listened to some harrowing stories throughout October, which was a particularly bad month. To have your home or other property flooded — sometimes repeatedly — is very difficult to cope with, and I realise that that has a personal impact on people's lives.

During my visit to Beragh on 25 October, I announced that an additional £1 million would be made available to the Rivers Agency to help with flood defences for areas such as Beragh. I will also continue to bid for further funds as opportunities arise. I will return to Beragh shortly to update the community on my efforts to deal with flooding.

I have asked for an urgent update of the Rivers Agency's flood alleviation programme in the light of recent flood events and the provision of the additional funding. As a matter of urgency, I have also asked my Assembly Private Secretary, Pat Doherty MP MLA, to undertake an investigation of the operational performance of the Rivers Agency during the October flooding incidents and to report back to me later this week. Once I have the opportunity

to consider the review of operational performance and the updated flood alleviation programme, I will consider how best to deal with the broader flooding issues.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra. I thank the Minister for her answer and, indeed, for her visit to Beragh on 25 October. As she is the Minister with responsibility for the Rivers Agency, I ask her to ensure that a permanent flood alleviation scheme for the village of Beragh is prioritised by her Department and by that agency as a matter of great urgency. Also, will she meet local residents and the Beragh Red Knights GAC when she returns to Beragh?

Mrs O'Neill: On the night in October when I visited the residents and met the football club, I gave a commitment that I would come back. I intend to do that later this week because, at that stage, I will have the outcome of the review that is being carried forward by Pat Doherty and will have had a chance to look at the prioritisation list. After flooding incidents, you have to go back and take a look at where everything sits in the priority list and then see whether you can reprioritise. The additional £1 million will assist us in doing that. So, I hope to be in Beragh some time before the end of the week.

Mr Hussey: The Minister will be aware that the problem was not confined to Beragh. Once the Beragh problem is sorted out, it will go further down the river. So, I ask the Minister to confirm that, when the review is undertaken, it will include the river from Beragh all the way into Omagh because the lower Market Street area of Omagh was also badly affected during that recent incident.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member. Any flood alleviation system that we bring in needs to be fit for purpose, and, whilst I was in Beragh in October, two gentlemen who live further downstream approached me to say that they were concerned that, if the proposed scheme went ahead, it would have a detrimental effect on them. So, the Rivers Agency and I are mindful of that, and the issue will be considered in the round. The list on reprioritisation incorporates everywhere that was flooded; it is not confined to Beragh. We have to look at everything in the round and all areas that were affected because, as you say, many areas were very negatively impacted on by the flooding.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister agree that the people of Beragh have suffered unduly in the past two years in that there have been two floods? Secondly, can she and her Department please put pressure on the Rivers Agency to come up with a scheme that will be workable and viable given that the local Red Knights club cannot now get compensation because of the excess of £25,000 and given that many local residents cannot get insurance?

Mrs O'Neill: I am very mindful of the impact of the repeated flooding on the people in Beragh. Moor Close and a number of other areas have been repeatedly flooded, and we need to take a look at the prioritisation list and make sure that we use the funds that we have to the best advantage and try to improve those people's lives. One lady said to me that, every time it rains, she frets about flooding. I can totally empathise with that, and I want to be able to take a look at the Rivers Agency's budget, prioritise that list and get work started as quickly as possible.

Common Agricultural Policy: Food Security

7. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of whether the issue of food security has been adequately addressed within the recent common agricultural policy proposals from the European Commission. (AQO 787/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The issue of food security is complex and needs to be viewed in the context of meeting growing food demand at global level. So, the question is this: how do the CAP proposals assist us in that task? That will depend on the CAP budget and the conditions that are attached to the direct payments that will be made. It is proposed that the CAP budget is frozen in cash terms at 2013 levels until 2020. That will impose a challenge, given that it will be eroded somewhat with inflation factors. It is probably better than was expected initially but will still place some constraints on our public expenditure. However, I will continue to fight hard against any further reductions during the negotiations that lie ahead.

There are aspects of the package that, I feel, undermine rather than strengthen the ability of the CAP post-2013 to address food security. In particular, I point to the requirement to take 7% of arable land out of production to satisfy an ecological focus area requirement. It is inevitable that large amounts of quality arable land will then be taken out of production across Europe. That does not make good sense at a time when feed costs are high, the demand for food is growing and the population is growing. We need to continue to expand, and the current proposals undermine the EU's agricultural competitiveness.

In addition, the proposed ban on first ploughing of carbon rich permanent pasture under new cross-compliance rules is likely to create a barrier towards the efficient use of grassland.

3.00 pm

In conclusion, the Commission needs to rethink some aspects of its proposals on CAP reform, especially on greening, to ensure that the CAP will enable the EU to make the necessary contribution towards meeting future world food production needs. In the period ahead, food security concerns because of growing world population and climate change issues are likely to work to our farmers' advantage. We should start to be able to produce things that other European countries will not be able to continue to do. We need to get the best deal that we can out of the CAP reforms —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up, and time is up for questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: If Members wish to converse, I ask them to do so outside the Chamber. Some Members wish to hear the answers to the questions that are being asked. Question 8 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Integrated Schools: Special Educational Needs

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Education what additional resources he will provide to the integrated sector for schools which have high demand for places from pupils with special educational needs statements. (AQO 793/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): After an education and library board agrees to issue a statement of special educational needs for a child attending a grant-maintained integrated school, the Department provides the necessary funding directly to the school to enable it to deliver the provision that is identified in the statement. If the child attends a controlled integrated school or any other form of state-funded school, the relevant education and library board (ELB) provides funding for the provision of the child's statementing from its block grant funding.

With regard to additional resources for pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), schools in the integrated sector are treated the same way as schools in all other sectors. Following submissions of final statements of SEN from the ELBs, the Department has funding authority for grant-maintained integrated schools and advises schools of the approved level and type of assistance that they will fund to be able to meet the needs of the statemented pupil. In the past three years, substantial additional funding has been allocated to 38 grant-maintained integrated schools with pupils with statements of special educational needs.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his answer. I understand that some schools are a bit reluctant to take on children with SEN so that they will not overstretch their resources. Does the Minister monitor schools on their intake of SEN pupils to ensure that those children get into the schools that they want without facing unreasonable and unnecessary barriers?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. The Department has statistical information on children with special educational needs at each school and in each sector. We would monitor a school only if it were brought to our attention that the school was being unreasonable by refusing entrance to a child with special educational needs. Indeed, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005 (SENDO) gives increased rights to parents to have their children educated in mainstream schools where that is their wish. I assure you that the boards, the Department and the vast majority of schools work with parents to meet the needs of a child with SEN and attempt to facilitate getting the child into the school of their choice, as they should do under legislation and, indeed, in respect of the basic rights of any young person.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister be committing any specific new funding to any sector while the process of establishing the Education and Skills Authority is under way?

Mr O'Dowd: I take it that the Member is referring to funding for special educational needs.

Mr Gardiner: I was referring to any schools.

Mr O'Dowd: I and my predecessor have ring-fenced special educational needs money in the budget, so it is protected from any savings plans that the Department of Education has to complete. Therefore, that money is secured, and we continually monitor our budgets to see whether we can free

up any resources to pump into front line education systems. Last Thursday, I announced that £40 million extra will go into the aggregated schools budget. That money has been secured from within the Department of Education's budget, and my departmental officials are still revising the budget to see whether any further savings are available for front line schools budgets.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister confirm whether there are, on average, more children statemented in integrated sector schools than in controlled or maintained schools? While I am on my feet, can I also ask the Minister what his attitude may be to bringing forward legislation on joint faith schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Two for the price of one. It would appear from the available statistics that there are more children with special educational needs in the integrated sector. The rationale for that has not been fully explained, so I do not wish to indulge in guesswork on that. However, that clearly is the case.

With regard to legislation for cross-faith schools, as part of the Programme for Government, I have agreed to bring forward a ministerial-led advisory team to look at the perceived and real blockages to greater sharing within our education system. That body will come back to me with a report on how we move forward to enhance sharing in education. If that requires further legislation, we will closely examine that. We want to ensure that we have greater sharing in our education system in which all sectors feel comfortable on the way forward.

Deprivation in Disadvantaged Communities

2. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Education to outline how his Department's policies are helping to combat deprivation in disadvantaged communities. (AQO 794/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my recent statement to the Assembly, I emphasised that my clear priority is to create an education service that ensures all our people receive a high quality education that enriches their lives and grows the economy respectively. That builds on the focus, introduced by my predecessor, on children and young people and on promoting equality, fulfilling educational potential and enriching life chances through education.

I want to ensure that children and young people in disadvantaged communities are enabled to reach their full potential and play a full part in the life and economy of the North. I am continuing to implement a suite of policies designed to achieve that aim. Those include school improvement, literacy and numeracy, the entitlement framework, transfer 2011 and beyond, extended and full service schools, free school meals, uniform grants, and the targeting social need element in the common funding formula.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for his answer. After explaining the current situation, will the Minister explain what he proposes to do as the next steps?

Mr O'Dowd: The next important step will be with regard to the common funding formula. I want to interrogate the common funding formula closely to see how we can direct resources into areas of most need to ensure that young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds

are given the greatest opportunity to move forward through the education system because it has been shown that one of the most successful ways out of poverty is through education.

Mr Storey: In the light of a number of reports that the Minister is well aware of, going back as far as his own Department's investigation into underachievement among working class Protestant boys, following on from Dawn Purvis's report and a multitude of other indicators, will he tell the House what specific action he and his Department have taken to intervene and work to ensure that that particular problem is addressed? He also referred to free schools meals. What is being done to ensure that working class Protestant families have access to, and are encouraged to take up, that provision?

Mr O'Dowd: There is a responsibility on us all. There is absolutely no stigma attached to any family claiming free school meals. That is their entitlement, and they should claim it as their right. There is no stigma attached to that. Many schools have introduced systems whereby it is impossible to tell which child is on free school meals and which is not. Those sorts of systems are excellent and should be encouraged and facilitated across the education system.

With regard to tackling educational under-attainment, the Member referred to Dawn Purvis's report, and I published a response to that report. I thought it was good piece of work. Many of the policies that the Department has in place will assist either community to come out of deprivation and lack of entitlement to education and other matters.

This is not a case of six of one, half a dozen of the other. I will target educational under-attainment wherever it exists, regardless of creed or colour. We will quite rightly focus on under-attainment by young Protestant boys. However, a higher number of young Catholic boys are leaving school without proper qualifications. That is unacceptable as well, and I have no doubt that the Member would agree with that.

Our policies are focussed on raising educational attainment. When we interrogate the common funding formula and look at directing funding to areas that have most deprivation, we again will be able to put more funding into Protestant areas of deprivation and any other area that is suffering from deprivation.

Mr McNarry: The problem is more pronounced and more deeply experienced in Protestant communities. Will the Minister specify whether this problem of educational underachievement in Protestant communities is under control? Is it decreasing and therefore improving? What level of work still has to be done? Will he quantify what his Department is doing for disadvantaged Protestant communities regarding the work that we are talking about?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not wish to get into an argument with Members about which community is suffering the most in respect of educational underachievement. However, I will say this: neither section of the community in its broadest terms is doing well. The problem particularly affects young people in working-class areas and areas of multiple deprivation, regardless of their creed or colour. What affects those young people is their class, and that is what we need to tackle.

My Department, under my predecessors through to myself, has developed a suite of policies that are designed to celebrate

success and challenge underachievement. That is what we are doing, and we are seeing an increase in the number of young people from all backgrounds leaving our school system with recognised qualifications; it is up by around 3,000 since 2006. So, our policies are beginning to bite.

Policies on their own, however, will not work. The school system has embraced the need to improve our educational output. Our teachers, our classroom assistants — all the staff in schools — and those who lead our schools, such as our boards of governors, have all embraced that and are moving forward. However, we have to open up all our schools to all our people. In answer to the previous question, we talked much about sharing education. Crossing the barrier of sharing education across the religious divide will be achieved. The difficult issue, which is a challenge that faces us all, is whether we are prepared to address problems in education across the socio-economic divide. That is as much a challenge for the Member's Benches as it for my Benches.

Mr McNarry: Are you prepared to do it?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister give his response to allegations that he used the launch of the Programme for Government to effectively bury the publication of a report on literacy and numeracy, which found wide disparity in the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Mr O'Dowd: No, because I was the person who insisted that we had a launch for the report into numeracy and literacy. I did that because the subject is so important. I could have signed off on that report and dispatched it to the media, the Education Committee and everyone else. I was the one who asked for a public launch. It is unfortunate that the launch clashed with the Programme for Government, but I assure you that there was no conspiracy.

With regard to my Department and my party's history in it, a very defensible set of policies has been put in place, which, as I said to the last Member, is now showing results. For example, 3,000 more young people left school last year with recognised qualifications than in 2006. That is a result. Is it good enough? No, and we intend to continue bearing down on underachievement. As I say, we should celebrate success and challenge underachievement.

There was absolutely no conspiracy in this case. There was no attempt by myself, my Department or anyone else to hide the report. I hope that everyone obtains a copy of the report, reads it and examines it. The report contains challenges for my Department, but it also acknowledges that my predecessors took on board the need to tackle underachievement and implemented policies to do that. So, I have no qualms whatsoever about publishing or defending my Department's role in numeracy and literacy.

Schools: Child Welfare

3. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Education to outline the procedure to be followed when a parent or a teacher considers that a child's welfare and best interests are not being served in a particular school and by a specific member of staff. (AQO 795/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A parent or teacher who has concerns about a child's welfare can seek support through the school's

pastoral care system. If additional support is required, the school can request it through the local education and library board. The nature of the concern will determine who should be approached. For example, a child protection concern should be raised with the designated teacher. If the concern is about learning difficulties, it should be raised with the special educational needs co-ordinator.

3.15 pm

Those staff are supported in their work by services in the education and library boards. For example, the child protection support service for schools supports schools and their governors in all aspects of child protection through a programme of training, a helpline and individual casework assistance. Other services that provide support include the education welfare service and the education psychology service.

If parents have a complaint about the way in which their child is being treated at school, they should use the school's parental complaints procedure, where available. If a teacher wishes to make a complaint against another member of staff, he or she should do so to the principal, or to the board of governors if the complaint is against the principal. The principal or board of governors is responsible for deciding on what course of action is to be taken, including any disciplinary action, in line with agreed procedures.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for his answer. What explanation could there be for parents not being provided with information surrounding any investigations that are carried out into complaints involving their children by the board of governors or the education board?

Mr O'Dowd: The complaints procedure in any establishment should be open and transparent. The details of the complaints procedure should be open to parents. I suspect that, as an investigation is ongoing, there would have to be confidentiality, given the legal ramifications of many of the decisions. However, the outcome of an investigation should be made known to the relevant parent and member of staff if that is the case.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What kind of support is readily available in our schools system to protect and support vulnerable children?

Mr O'Dowd: Several factors are at work in our schools. The education welfare service is a specialist education support service that seeks to help young people of compulsory school age and their families to get the best out of the education system. Its mission is to promote the participation of children and young people in beneficial education through a partnership and inclusive approach. The education welfare service also undertakes a number of other important related duties around child protection, child behaviour in schools, suspensions and expulsions, child employment, special educational needs, looked-after children and school-age mothers.

The five boards also have an inter-regional inclusion and diversity service. In addition, they have a specific programme for looked-after children and Traveller children. All of those services are also available to special needs children. Furthermore, ChildLine and the anti-bullying forum also provide a beneficial service to education.

Mr Cree: What specific steps has the Minister taken to create structures in the system that will improve relations between parents and schools?

Mr O'Dowd: The relationship between parents and schools has to be at ground level. It has to be between the principal, the individual teachers, the parents, with whom they interact daily, and the boards of governors. The board of governors of any school is the management authority of that school. It is responsible for the running of that school, discipline and all staffing matters. We offer support and guidance to boards of governors through the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the education and library boards and other governing bodies to assist them with what are sometimes complicated legal matters. The boards of governors are responsible for those relationships.

Mr Eastwood: It is clear from the Minister's answers that he values the work of teachers. Therefore, does he support the teachers who will be striking next week against pension cuts?

Mr O'Dowd: I support the right of any worker to be balloted for strike action, and, if that ballot goes forward, to take strike action. The majority of our teaching unions have gone through that process. They have balloted their members, and the majority have decided to withdraw their labour. I support their right to do that. However, the pension scheme is the direct responsibility of the British Government.

The Executive were faced with removing £300 million from the Executive programme to deal with the pensions issue. We have said that we agree in principle on the pension issue. I, as Minister, have set forth a pension funding scheme that protects all workers who earn under £32,000 a year. Until you earn £32,000 a year, there will be no changes to your pension whatsoever. That is what I have put on the table for consultation with the unions and the other parties. However, resolution of the dispute does not rest with the Assembly or the Executive. I believe that its resolution rests with Whitehall. Most of our unions are involved in negotiations through their sponsoring bodies in Westminster.

I have done all that I can to help deal with the difficulties facing the Department of Education. I have put a proposal on the table that will protect low-paid workers and medium-earning workers. The unions have decided to go ahead with their strike, and I respect that, but I urge the British Government to bring a resolution to the matter very quickly. I have no doubt that the vast majority of our teachers do not want to be out on strike action but feel that they have been left with no other choice.

Educational Attainment

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of how his Department's policies have improved educational attainment over recent years. (AQO 796/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Policies aimed at raising standards include the school improvement policy; the literacy and numeracy strategy; the revised curriculum and entitlement framework; ending selection; and extended and full service schools programmes. As soon as strategies for special educational needs and for inclusion and early years are finalised, a coherent set of policies will be in place to improve

educational outcomes for young people and to address the root causes of underachievement.

We have made good progress on raising standards. In 2006, 53% of school leavers achieved five or more good GCSEs, including GCSE English and maths. In 2010, that improved to 59%, which equates to almost 3,000 more young people. Standards have also improved at primary level. However, we remain average by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards, and we still have too many young people who do not achieve the expected level in literacy and numeracy. Those skills are vital to their futures and to our economy. Therefore, I am stepping up the pace of implementation and delivery of the policies that deliver our raising standards agenda.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. The Minister made a statement in September on the future of education. What impact does he feel that that will have? Will it build on the good work that has already been done on educational attainment?

Mr O'Dowd: The focus of my statement in September was about the raising of education standards. The sustainable schools policy does what it says on the tin: it looks at a sustainable way forward for schools so that they are in a place to deliver the curriculum in the future. What we require is a network of schools of a suitable size to deliver the entitlement framework and the requirements of a modern education network. That is central.

I also said in my statement in September that I will progress the development of the Every School a Good School agenda so that once a school goes into a formal intervention process, which happens when a school has been identified as not meeting all the target needs of its pupils, it will undergo an immediate viability audit to see whether it has a future in educating the young people in its charge. It is not the institutions that are important but the young people attending those institutions. They will be the focus of any future policies.

Mr Givan: The Minister highlighted children with special educational needs in his statement. What can he do to deal with boards that produce development proposals to close schools — such as Knockmore Primary School in my constituency — that will be to the detriment of children who have special needs?

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that the board made no decision at its meeting last Thursday. It felt that further consideration time was required as the consultation had closed only on that day. I do not think that a development proposal has yet been published or that any decision has yet been reached on the matter. However, what we have to focus on in the broader principles of special educational needs is the needs of the child rather than the needs of the institution, as I said previously. That is what we will be focusing on.

Boards and elected representatives will have to make difficult decisions as the process develops. We cannot retain the number of schools that we have in place. However, we are not going through a numbers game. There is a policy in place that will identify those schools that are under pressure. Once those schools are identified, they will go through further interrogation to gain a sense of their future viability and to determine what plans they have for the young

people. If we remain focused on the educational needs of the young person, we will work our way through this.

I appreciate that Members, as locally elected representatives, have every right and should, and will continue to, raise the concerns of parents at a number of schools. However, I ask that, on each occasion, Members ask about the standard of education in those establishments and then move on to the debate.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will he please detail what specific initiatives and funding he is deploying, or intends to deploy, in support of early years education, especially those measures aimed at reducing literacy and numeracy problems? Does he agree with me that money invested at the very beginning of the educational process will bring rich rewards at the end for a good deal less money?

Mr O'Dowd: Money is the key to many issues with which we involve ourselves daily in the Assembly. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find any spare money in the system. The early years programme has been rolling out since 1997 in preschool education. The percentage of young people who attend preschool education is now in the high 90s. The Programme for Government has made a commitment to make it available to all parents who want their children to attend preschool education, which is a welcome development. The Member is absolutely right: a child's early development years are the most important in building up their ability to absorb and learn further information.

I continually review my budget to see where there is spare cash. Money is very limited, and I wish to direct it to front line services. I have the consultation responses of the review of the 0-6 early years strategy on my desk. I am going through those with a view to publishing a way forward later on in the year or early in the spring. I have also conducted an internal review of the application process for parents and young children attending preschool education, which I hope to be in a position to publish in the next couple of weeks. All those things are designed to ensure that our early years programme is as effective and efficient as possible.

Aghavilly Primary School and Keady Primary School

5. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to ensure that Keady and Aghavilly primary schools will remain open for the foreseeable future to avoid the loss of vital rural education services and community resources. (AQO 797/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the responsibility of the relevant education and library board, in the first instance, to manage provision in the controlled estate. Any significant change to a school, such as closure, requires the publication of a statutory development proposal to support it.

In the case of Keady and Aghavilly primary schools, the Southern Education and Library Board published separate development proposals on 5 September 2011. Those proposed that the schools should close at the end of the current school year. The statutory two-month consultation period following publication has just ended, and my officials are collating information about the proposals. The proposals will be analysed against the Department's policy framework,

and I will make my decision on each having considered the factors involved and the comments received. On that basis, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on those two individual proposals at this stage.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his response. Given the serious concerns and uncertainty in my constituency, will the Minister agree to meet me and a small delegation of principals from my constituency, including the principals of the two schools and the principal of the primary school in Annaghmore, which has just received news that a new nursery unit has not been approved?

Mr O'Dowd: With regard to the proposal on the nursery unit, I can meet the Member and the delegation. I believe that we are talking about the same school. The proposal has been finalised, and I have signed off on it.

However, with regard to the two ongoing development proposals, I am involved in a legal process. The two-month statutory consultation process has now closed. I am at the decision-making stage, and, unfortunately, I cannot meet the Member on that matter because to do so would breach a legal precedent.

I am more than happy to meet the Member about the Orchard County Primary School's nursery school proposal.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire an aontaíonn sé go bhféadfadh cónaidhmeanna idir scoileanna bheith ina réiteach ar inmharthanacht scoileanna tuaithe. Does the Minister accept that federations between schools could be a real solution for rural areas? Will he positively promote federation?

Mr O'Dowd: Federations may be a solution in a number of instances. Whether they are always the ideal solution is open to debate, because each school, community and location throws up its own uniqueness. You have to look at all the available options. I await the proposals from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and boards on the future planning of the schools estate. I will look at each proposal and plan on its own merits.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is the end of Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

3.30 pm

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

Private Members' Business

Libraries

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mrs McKeivitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses great concern about the reduction in the opening hours of small community libraries which will curtail their ability to deliver an efficient and effective service; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to take action to ensure that the excellent service provided by these libraries is maintained.

Over the last year or so, we have come to appreciate exactly what devolution means in a time of austerity. Public-spending cuts are designed in broad strokes by the Treasury in London and handed over to locally elected Ministers for more precise targeting and delivery on the ground. That is why I come to this debate with a certain amount of sympathy for the position of Libraries NI — but only a certain amount.

According to the Minister's website, Libraries NI aims to provide a flexible and responsive library service that provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential, but you can forget about all that. Libraries NI has really only one job to do at the moment: to deliver £10.8 million in cuts.

The consultation on library opening hours will run until 2 December. Many of us believe that that type of consultation is just a box-ticking exercise dreamed up by consultants long after the real decisions on cuts have been made by civil servants in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). It is billed as a review of opening hours, but we all know that the only outcome can be a downward review; upward is simply out.

The Minister gave the game away when answering a question from my colleague Dominic Bradley last week. He asked why the figure of 80,000 annual activities was chosen as the benchmark for classification of libraries in bands, and she told him that it was chosen to allow the financial savings required. It is clear from her answers to other questions that all the activities of library branches were not taken into account when arriving at that figure. It is not really a benchmark of library activity at all. It is simply a financial benchmark and a figure plucked out of the air to make the sums work.

It is clear from the consultation literature that the first principle is not to achieve any of the admirable aims of the Libraries NI mission statement but simply that the proposal

for revised opening hours must deliver the required level of savings.

They are not revising the opening hours; they are reducing them, so why does the Minister not come out and say that? It is not acceptable that financial savings targets devised by people with no actual knowledge of libraries should be the starting point for discussion on the role of the service. That is where the Minister comes in, or, at least, should come in. We do not need a Minister just to pass on the cuts; that could be done by civil servants or by a computer. It is the job of the Minister to take responsibility for the financial target and for its impact on the area that has been entrusted to her care. Just spreading the saving targets across all libraries will not do it. She is responsible for the delivery of a proper library service, and she must answer the question of whether it be done with this level of cutbacks. We do not think it can. We believe that the cutbacks will curtail the ability to deliver an efficient and effective service.

Local representations have been made to keep certain libraries open or to keep the opening hours for certain libraries, but, as public representatives, we should make sure that we are not playing off against each other. Politics must not always be purely local. We should not simply accept that we can save our library at the cost of someone else's. Therefore, why has nobody questioned the overall social and educational impact of reducing the level of library provision? Why is the Minister not doing that?

Mr Byrne: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she accept that branch libraries in small rural towns are crucial for students who are studying at university or further education colleges, and who return home to places such as Castlederg, Newtown Stewart and Fintona, and want a library to work in? Also, in Fermanagh, there are two branch libraries in Lisnaskea and Irvinestown, and there is great concern about the downgrading of the opening hours there.

Mrs McKeivitt: Absolutely. Library access is important for educational development, particularly for imparting literacy. Getting books into the hands of children and making them curious about the whole world of books is the greatest gift we as parents can give them. Schools inspectors tell us that one in five children leaves primary school with poor literacy skills. Where does that finding play in the decision-making process? Contrary to popular impressions, not everyone has home broadband, and some people depend on the local library for internet access. Therefore, many adults need their library even more.

Looking at the wider implications of the cuts is perhaps not a job for Libraries NI, although it seems that those questions probably would have been asked under the old education and library board system. However, surely the Minister has at least had a chat with her party colleague in the Department of Education. I know that joined-up government is too much to hope for under joint Sinn Féin/DUP rule, but surely party colleagues are still able to talk to each other.

Libraries are mainly used by groups such as the young and the elderly, but they are important assets for the whole community. We need to hear from the educationalists about the impact of the cuts, and we need to hear from experts and voluntary bodies concerned with social exclusion. We need to do some serious thinking on the cumulative impact

of reducing public service delivery in small communities. We need to think about whether it is genuinely more efficient to concentrate more and more services in ever fewer outlets. We should not allow those services to get picked off one by one until we are left with the gutted shelves of once vibrant village communities. This is the right time to raise the issue of service levels in small communities.

The plans do not make any real long-term sense because library business is booming, and we should be trying to drive it up, not down. In my constituency, the libraries in Warrenpoint and Kilkeel are getting well over 40,000 visitors a year, and the hours in Newcastle library have been cut to 40 hours a week, even though it gets 62,000 visitors a year. We should be revamping the older buildings, making them more child friendly and bringing more people through the doors by making them centres of excellence for accessing information by every means available.

In political debate on cutbacks, the clincher question is often: where do you get the money? We are in grave danger of depleting our cultural and educational capital, and, if we get it wrong, we will pay dearly in the future, and not only in hard financial terms.

Schoolchildren in Kilkeel sent a very clear message to Libraries NI through their local newspaper. Last Saturday, they held a protest where everyone wore purple to support the call. The amount of people who attended that protest speaks for itself. The message that the children were trying to deliver was "hands off our library".

The people cannot be ignored. They have taken part in the consultation process; they have written letters; and they have made banners and stood in the rain to protest. The Minister needs to take action. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr McMullan: I beg to move the following amendment:
Insert after "Assembly"

"welcomes the decision by the board of Libraries NI to initiate a review of eight of the 10 rural libraries that were originally earmarked for closure;"

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As a result of the comprehensive spending review, Libraries NI has to make savings in the region of £10.3 million by 2015. Since it was established in April 2009, Libraries NI has made savings totalling £2.7 million, mainly through a reduction in posts at managerial and administrative levels and streamlining stock. Unfortunately, savings mean a reduction in services.

When considering the matter, Members can get very emotive. This is the first time that we have had a review of the library provision across the entire library service since 1973, which is 38 years ago. Bear that in mind when we get a wee bit emotive.

The proposed reduction of opening times is listed in the four bands.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: Just a wee minute; I am only getting started. We must remember that libraries are one of the few, if not the last, remaining public services, and we must remember the vital role that they play in the social cohesion of the communities that they are in. Who gains from local libraries? An increasing number of children and young people, along

with their parents, see local libraries as a haven and a place of leisure. As was said, the unemployed also use the library, as do jobseekers. The elderly and disabled use it for socialising. Libraries NI has a major role to play in community and social cohesion.

This cannot be a public consultation only. If we are to review the present stock over a two-year period, everyone and everything must be reviewed. When we consider that this is the first opportunity since 1973, as I said, it must be taken. Bear in mind that we have had the promise that no staff will be made redundant. They will be moved or offered voluntary redundancy, or natural wastage will apply. There is a system in place in which staff, if moved to another library, will be reimbursed for travelling, and so on. We must bear that in mind as well.

Libraries NI has an excellent opportunity to bring its library estate up to the present day standard and, at the same time, put in place the modernising structures that will allow it to be the hub of rural community life for everyone. In the two years, it must put in place a strategy that is community-led. That means talking to community groups, councils, schools, social services, and so on. Last week, the draft investment strategy and the draft Programme for Government stated the important role that libraries play in improving literacy and numeracy in the most disadvantaged areas.

Some of the libraries in the review are part of the rural development programme's village renewal measure, where funding is made available on a strict timetable. That must be considered when the review is being evaluated. However, we must remember that the review will take over two years. Instead of sitting back and pointing the finger at everybody, we are where we are with the review. Ten libraries were due to be closed, but we have managed to keep eight open. We must go out now and make sure that, after two years, those eight libraries are still open.

Mr D Bradley: The SDLP will be supporting the Sinn Féin amendment. We, too, welcome the decision by the board of Libraries NI to initiate a review of the eight libraries referred to in the amendment. However, we should not make the mistake of assuming that, because they are being reviewed, those libraries' future is secure.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I take on board what you say. You are right, and I will deal with that near the end.

What is not said in the consultation, but which must be put out there by Libraries NI, relates to the four league tables that we all know about, and this will go some way towards answering your question. There is nothing in the review to say that library hours cannot be improved if the library comes up to standard or if its standard improves. That is something that Libraries NI should take on board. It would be like a carrot at the end of the stick. It would empower communities to push that bit harder to improve what they have. However, that is my opinion only, and I will be asking Libraries NI to consider it.

3.45 pm

I congratulate the members of the new board and its chair in taking on all the fears. When the closure of libraries was looked at, the rurality of things was not considered, and

I ask them to take that on board. Thankfully, rurality was included when an assessment of the opening hours was carried out, and the rural aspect came out very much in all the campaigns that were waged. We congratulate everybody concerned with the campaign, including community groups, individuals and schools. In my area, one of the schools composed a song about the significance of its library and why it should be kept open.

Mr D Bradley: Will you give us a bar?

Mr McMullan: Only in the bath.

That is a sound basis and the foundation of a good cohesive society, and, if people are given the proper help, they will make those libraries work.

I ask Libraries NI to look at the forthcoming rural White Paper, and everybody should bear it in mind. Quite a lot of what is in that paper will have great significance for services in rural areas, for example, for transport.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for giving way. The importance of libraries in rural communities is vital, and that is what is driving the motion. Mr McMullan said earlier that Libraries NI has not reviewed its strategy for over 30 years. Does he not recall the North Eastern Education and Library Board closing libraries across his geographical area, especially up in Moyle, in 2005 when it took steps to make stringent cuts?

Mr McMullan: The Member is quite right. However, if he were to read the information he got, he would see that it is the first time that it has been able to do that without the stranglehold of the education boards. It is there clearly in black and white —

Mr Swann: I have just been reading about the education and library boards. They closed them —

Mr McMullan: No. I will leave that for you to read again, and I thank you for your intervention — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Members know from reading their books that they are not to make remarks across the Floor.

Mr McMullan: I congratulate everybody here. I think that my amendment to the motion will unite the Assembly. We all want to see this working and the libraries being kept open. Councils have a big role to play. There is an onus on the eight libraries that have been left open to go into partnership or find some other way to come up with innovative ideas to prove that they can carry on, and the onus is on us to put that message out there. I do not believe that there can be any excuse.

The Member who proposed the motion said that Libraries NI has only one job at the minute. I do not believe that. As I said earlier, we cannot have a public consultation and just leave it like that. Libraries NI has to go out and work on a strategy and come back and tell us how it will take the libraries on. It cannot leave it in abeyance for two years, with people wondering whether they will be all right in two years. It must put a strategy in place. In other words, those libraries must be shown the bar that they have to work to in order to improve and remain open.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): As Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I want to outline briefly some of the discussions that the Committee has had with Libraries NI in recent months on the proposed closure of some libraries and the proposal to reduce the opening hours of many others.

The amendment acknowledges that there has been, at least, a temporary reprieve from closure for some libraries. The Committee welcomed last month's announcement by Libraries NI that eight of the 10 libraries that had initially been earmarked for closure will remain open, albeit subject to further review. The Committee was also pleased that, in coming to that decision, Libraries NI took on board the views of the Committee and of relevant communities. As a Member for Strangford, I am absolutely delighted that Killyleagh library has been given such a reprieve. Getting back to my role as Chair of the Committee, the Committee urges Libraries NI to work closely with communities in those areas to ensure that those libraries receive all the support that they need to meet the conditions of the review.

Mr McCarthy: I fully support the Member's congratulations for the retention of Killyleagh library. Does the Member agree that had it not been for a concerted campaign from local residents and users that might not have been the case?

Miss M McIlveen: I accept the Member's comments and I thank him for them. A job of work still needs to be done and support needs to be given to communities. Killyleagh is one such community.

We also must call on Libraries NI to work with the communities in the remaining two localities, Moy and Moneymore, where libraries are due to close. Libraries NI must identify an alternative, workable library solution for people in those areas. Children, older people, people with disabilities and those with dependents have the most to lose from local libraries closing, and Libraries NI and the Minister must ensure that everything is done to minimise the impact of library closures on those communities.

I want to move on to the motion itself, which relates to the proposal to reduce opening hours for some libraries. During our briefing from Libraries NI on 6 October, the Committee heard that, as a result of the Budget process, Libraries NI must save £10.2 million during the current comprehensive spending review period. The Committee fully appreciates that Libraries NI faces difficult and challenging decisions to achieve that level of savings, and that a reduction in opening hours has been identified as a way of achieving significant savings. We are aware that Libraries NI is involved in a two-part consultation process on the proposals. The first part is due to end on 2 December, and it concerns the proposed four bands of opening hours. The Committee will receive a further briefing from Libraries NI in early December on that consultation. We urge it and the Minister to listen to communities about the impact of such reductions and, in coming to any decision, to ensure that future library services will properly meet the needs of communities. The second part of the consultation is scheduled to begin in the new year, and it will involve engagement with customers at an individual library level to establish the best pattern of opening hours to meet local needs.

The Committee is fully aware of how pivotal library services are to library users and to their communities. In many cases, libraries are focal points of communities and offer shared community spaces, help to stimulate learning and contribute to social cohesion. Libraries are not just about lending books: they offer many benefits, including rhythm and rhyme sessions and places where a community can meet, learn and interact. The Committee recognises the very positive contribution that our libraries continue to make to communities, which is why the Committee is concerned about reduced opening hours. We have sought assurances that, when taking its tough decisions, Libraries NI ensures that local users' decisions are paramount.

The Committee is also concerned about the reduction of staff hours. Hours are due to be cut by approximately 1,200 hours a week, which is the equivalent of some 33 full-time posts; such cuts will be a blow to our front line library service. Libraries NI hopes to achieve those savings through voluntary redundancies, but there are no guarantees that that will be the case. Therefore the Committee looks forward to a further update from Libraries NI on the impact of cuts on staff and services.

In conclusion, the Committee is also pleased that the Minister has agreed to review her Department's strategy, *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, to ensure that it is fit for purpose. The Committee will be fully engaged in that review and in the review of mobile libraries that is scheduled for next year. Library services will remain a priority for the Committee, which will uphold its scrutiny and consultative role and continue to hold Libraries NI and the Minister to account over these issues.

Mr Swann: I support the motion and the amendment. I was initially confused by the amendment because I thought that it contradicted the motion. However, I then realised that that was of the same standing as what Libraries NI did, because it ran two consultations simultaneously, one on closures and the other on reduced hours. When the consultation for reduced hours came out, it included libraries that were due for closure. So, when those libraries saw the second consultation, they thought that they had been saved but with reduced hours. I understand now how the amendment fits with the motion, and I thank Mr McMullan for that.

The issue of opening hours, as well as that of closures, will have local communities up in anger. They are emotive subjects about which communities are passionate. Mr McMullan asked us earlier — I think that he referred to Mrs McKeivitt — not to get emotional about this, but then he went on to tell us how one of his local communities commissioned a song because they felt so passionately about it. We have to apply the same standards. Libraries are an emotive issue in our rural communities. I know that through experience in my village of Kells and Connor, where our library was one of those under threat.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that, although libraries are an important issue in rural communities, it is not restricted to just the rural community? The confusion and lack of joined-up thinking that has been produced by the libraries authority is shown, for example, in my constituency. Notwithstanding the loss of hours at Donaghadee and Holywood, Bangor library — in which there has been massive investment in the past few years and which has the second highest number of active

users — faces the biggest single drop in opening hours in band one. Therefore, confusion seems to run throughout libraries, whether rural, urban or suburban.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his intervention, although I was always led to believe that they were meant to be brief. I agree that rural and urban libraries are under the same threat when we look at the reduced hours that are being put forward. It is important to note concerns about the effect that a reduction in hours will have on communities. The Member referred to his constituency, before he walks out the door. I will stay here and talk about mine. In North Antrim, for example, we are down to six libraries. Of those, two will face reduced hours: Ballycastle, a 35% reduction and Ballymoney, a 30% reduction. Three are already down to the bare minimum of 18 hours: Kells and Connor, Portglenone and Broughshane.

Honestly, I am not picking on you, but, Mr McMullan, a large number of libraries were closed when the North Eastern Education and Library Board took a decision in 2005 that many other education and library boards did not. This is the first time that there has been a consultation without the education and library boards having a stranglehold on Libraries NI, because Libraries NI only came into being in April 2009. It was not there in 2005.

I can give the House a few quotes to illustrate the effect that libraries have in our communities and the richness and value that they give. In regard to the economic downturn, an unemployed single mother said:

"I'm glad we have the library on our doorstep because I can now look for jobs online. My son is going into P7 in September. Schools nowadays use computers and the internet a lot. I cannot afford to have a computer in my house."

[*Interruption.*] You can laugh, Mr Dunne, but these are true facts and statements that I got while we worked on the consultation regarding the closure of the library in Kells.

On young people and literacy, set as clear targets in the Programme for Government:

"We always take the playgroup to the library every week. It helps them, introduces them to reading, which helps the children to begin to learn to write. It also gets them interested in books, which is good for their concentration and listening skills."

That comment was from a playgroup employee in Kells.

With a reduced number of libraries open for reduced hours in rural communities, if those reduced hours are not managed right, so that libraries are available to people when they are needed, they cannot access libraries.

"We can't afford to travel to the main towns either by bus or taxi. When the library closes in our village or reduces its hours, we won't be able to access its facilities."

That comment was from a father of three.

4.00 pm

This is not a new thing. Minister, the motion calls on you to take action. I realise that Libraries NI is an arm's-length body, but I draw your attention to its targets, which are set

out in 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries'. It says that 85% of households should have access to a library service within 2 miles. The current result is 84% achieved in Northern Ireland. Everybody automatically thinks that that is fantastic. However, if you remove Belfast's statistics — I am not creating an urban/rural divide — only 60% of households in North Antrim, my constituency, reach that target.

A third consultation is due, on mobile provision. There will be further worry about reduction. Mrs McKeivitt said that this was about cost savings and cutbacks. There is a third consultation coming, and that will be about possible reductions in mobile provision. The same target in 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' says that every mobile stop that is accessible should be available for at least half an hour every two weeks. Of the 978 mobile stops across Northern Ireland, only 27.9% meet that target. That means that 72.1% do not.

In conclusion —

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

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have to acknowledge that the libraries that have received a temporary stay of closure —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Swann: We encourage them to stay open, congratulate the volunteers who have done Libraries NI's job for it in many cases and ask the Minister now to do her bit.

Ms Lo: I welcome the motion, which highlights a genuine concern facing the future of our community libraries. While I welcome the motion, I must say how saddened I am that we once again have to defend our community libraries from drastic cutbacks that will undermine their sustainability and have a serious impact on the services and programmes that they are able to offer. We are a society that boasts of Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney and C S Lewis, but we yet again have to defend the vital services that our community libraries provide. In Northern Ireland, we have fewer libraries per person than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. With the proposed cuts in library opening hours, that disparity looks set to continue.

Although I acknowledge that we are working within the framework of cuts to services throughout all Departments in Northern Ireland, local libraries offer an opportunity to combine vital services in order to prevent further blows to our already suffering communities. The Alliance Party advocates the co-location of other community services, such as health and education, in order to ensure the sustainability of their provision. For example, in my constituency, Belvoir has seen several damaging closures, with the result that the two buildings that housed Belvoir clinic and Belvoir library have closed their doors to the public. I advocate examining the situation to see if one of the buildings could be opened to combine modified versions of library and clinic facilities, including a dedicated area for Sure Start.

Libraries are not simply about books. Co-location with other services would undoubtedly lead to increased usage and, therefore, increased provision of programmes offered by community libraries. In relation to library usage, we have

an opportunity to provide leadership and focus our efforts on engaging local communities so that they are aware of the excellent service that libraries offer. Libraries provide an opportunity to tackle social deprivation and encourage social inclusion, as others have said. It must be pointed out that reducing opening hours is certainly not the way to achieve that. The Alliance Party met Irene Knox of Libraries NI to raise its concerns regarding the proposed reduction in hours of the Cregagh library by 25%. On Thursday, I will attend Cregagh library with my colleagues for the open day, which is part of our drive to encourage library use. I take the opportunity to invite those who live in Cregagh to come along between 1.00 pm and 8.00 pm to explore the excellent resources that the library offers.

The Alliance Party argues that reducing the opening hours of all community libraries, not just small community libraries, threatens their sustainability and their ability to provide vital services and programmes that benefit a wide range of sectors in our community. We note with particular concern the potential negative impact that reducing opening hours will have on working families.

Although we welcome the potential for any library to remain open and acknowledge the important role that rural libraries play, I believe that the amendment glosses over the important fact that community libraries across the board are under threat due to the reduction in opening hours. That part of the motion will be completely lost if the amendment is made. Therefore, we will have difficulty supporting the amendment. We do not wish to split the House, so we will wait and see what happens.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Members for bringing the motion to the House. As someone who was heavily involved in a local campaign to keep an important facility open in Richhill, I know at first hand that the subsequent threat placed on such facilities by the Minister has seen local communities galvanised in opposition. There has been a surge in the use of such facilities, which is good news for libraries. They are important facilities for any village or town, and I am grateful that Richhill library has been spared the axe for the time being and will be permitted to continue offering its vital service to the local community. However, as the local campaign manager in Richhill, Myles McCormick, who led a marvellous campaign and to whom the residents owe a great debt, pointed out, the issue of reduced opening hours remains at large despite our facility in Richhill being given a lifeline for the next two years. In my constituency, Armagh, Tandragee, Bessbrook and Crossmaglen libraries are under the microscope as regards opening hours, with proposals to reduce them in each facility. That has alarmed local people.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. He mentioned the libraries in Newry and Armagh. Indeed, all band 4 libraries were subject to a criterion of 80,000 activities. Does the Member agree that that placed those libraries, which are open fewer than 30 hours a week, at a severe disadvantage from the outset? It is a situation in which they will find it difficult to compete with larger libraries. Does he agree that the 80,000 activities threshold is unfair and inequitable to smaller libraries?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree that this has caused alarm among local people and users

of the services. Libraries are useful resources, especially for pupils and students, and every effort must be made to resist reducing their operating times, which will prevent those who need the services from accessing them.

Mr Moutray: I thank my colleague for giving way. Does he agree that libraries are now used for providing many more diverse services than they once did? I think of my own library in Lurgan, which already this year has hosted the launch of a children's book, a historical photograph exhibition and, only two weeks ago, the Hugo Duncan roadshow.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. He has highlighted a number of issues relating to libraries.

There is no doubt that, with the advance of technologies such as the internet, online bookstores, Kindles etc, libraries are battling for their place in today's society. However, they still occupy an important place in community cohesion. They are useful resources for students and schoolchildren, and I feel strongly that they must be retained at their current capacity. In my constituency, the four libraries whose opening hours are under review must be permitted to continue providing their services at a suitable level for the benefit of their communities. I will continue my lobbying of Libraries NI and, indeed, the Minister to ensure that she is fully aware of the depth of feeling in the community about the importance of local library provision. I support the motion.

Ms Ruane: Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, nó ceapaim go bhfuil sé an-tábhachtach go mbeadh leabharlanna sármhaithe againn — leabharlanna le hacmhainní suimiúla agus leis na teicneolaíochtaí is déanaí.

I welcome the debate; it is important that we are having it. It is also important that we make sure that we have the best-stocked libraries while taking new technology into account.

I note that the consultation has not been completed. I will not take the same cynical view as Ms Karen McKeivitt. I am happy to debate the issue. However, we should not politicise it, and I think that, in many ways, we are having a premature debate, although it is always good to have a debate. In many ways, however, it might have been more useful to have this debate after the consultation.

Most Members, I have to say, engaged in a very mature debate. The Chair of the Committee expressed not only her concerns but her support for work that the Minister and her local library have done. We need to give credit where credit is due, and we need to give credit whenever extra money is found. It is difficult to find money in these times, and everyone in the House voted for the Programmes for Government. Some parties, particularly those to my left, like to think that they are in opposition. *[Interruption.]* Karen McKeivitt attacked Minister Ní Chuilín, who is here, as well as the Minister of Education, who is not even in the House.

We need to have a good and fair debate, and we need to make the most of our opportunity to create a world-class library service right across the North while taking account of the changes in our society. Our society is in a very different space from where it was 10 or 20 years ago. Technology is moving so fast. Twenty, 30 or 40 years ago many women were in the home full time; they want different and more flexible opening hours now that they, and men, work outside

the home — those who are fortunate enough to have work outside the home.

The job of a Minister is to make sure that decisions are made objectively and fairly, openly and transparently. They must take their equality duties and rurality into account. I believe that this Minister and Libraries NI are doing their very best to do that, and we should give them a bit of credit. Eight libraries will open that would not have opened were it not for the good work not only of local campaigners but of this Minister and Libraries NI, who are both listening.

I agree absolutely with my colleague Oliver McMullan about the importance of links with the community. Whenever we look at the statistics and at the numbers using particular libraries, we will see that we need to ensure that more people are aware of what is in their local library and that they work in consultation with their schools and community centres so that we can use our public resources widely.

Tá freagracht orainn mar ionadaithe poiblí agus mar Chomhaltai den Tionól seo tacaíocht a thabhairt donár leabharlanna.

In Ireland, we have many writers. We have a great number of people who have won the Nobel prize for literature. I celebrate that, and we need to continue with that tradition. My colleague Anna Lo mentioned people such as C S Lewis; Brian Friel and Seamus Heaney were also mentioned. Irish writers are known all over the world. It is good to see that, and I welcome it.

4.15 pm

I have no doubt that the Minister and Libraries NI will do everything they can to create a world-class library system. The Chair of the Committee asked the Minister to listen. I have no doubt that she will continue to listen, as she has done in the past. I ask Members not to politicise the issue. Let us do everything we can to make sure that we get the resources needed and use them in the best possible way. As my colleague Oliver McMullan mentioned, I welcome the fact that Libraries NI is doing everything it can to avoid compulsory redundancies. I have no doubt that workers in the library service welcome that. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, táim fórbhuíoch de gach duine as ton na díospóireachta, agus tá súil agam go mbeidh toradh maith againn uirthi. Go raibh maith agaibh.

Mrs McKeivitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to put it on record that I have never attacked anybody in my life.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, but you have managed to put it on record.

Mr Hilditch: Considering the timing of the consultation, it is appropriate that we debate the issue, and I welcome the opportunity to do so today. The delivery of library services has been under close scrutiny in recent times, with reviews of not only urban and rural branches for potential closure but opening hours and, of course, the future scrutiny of mobile services. So there is quite a lot going on in the organisation; some might say, "Too much". That has led to a certain amount of confusion and fear in the service and among the public, who see the overlapping of those reviews as a tactic to, perhaps, dilute front line services. At times, it appears to a lay person that it is a case of, "If we

do not get you one way, we will get you another". That said, the reprieve that many local libraries received is welcome, although, again, I understand that some are conditional on circumstances being improved through repairs, renovations and even new premises, with partner agencies required to allow their continued existence.

Mr Swann: We continually refer to the eight libraries that have been saved. However, it would be remiss of the House not to take into consideration the two libraries that face closure. The Minister should take them into consideration when considering mobile library provision in the future consultation.

Mr Hilditch: Thanks for the intervention. I certainly agree that they should be taken into consideration.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. As Mr Swann said, two libraries face closure, one of which is in my constituency. Does the Member agree that the provision of a mobile library is not always the answer and that, had Libraries NI looked at alternative premises to address some of the foreseen problems, it would indeed have dealt with some of them?

Mr Hilditch: I certainly agree that mobile libraries are not the answer, and I appeal to the board to look at alternative facilities.

Having survived one review, many libraries have been suddenly and quickly thrown into another; this time, a review of opening hours. That is disappointing to say the least, and, as a result, worries and concerns have resurfaced very quickly. The communities that rallied round in support of their local service a few weeks ago must do so again in a short space of time with no respite. Having had their fears dealt with previously, staff face uncertainty again. Although many of us recognise that Libraries NI's actions are a reaction to budgetary matters and the comprehensive spending review, we ask what measures or efficiencies were progressed in the service before it was agreed to go for front line services as a way of making efficiencies and savings. What other detail is available from the board, through its management structure from the top down, to show that maximum opportunities have been taken to ensure that front line services are the very last thing to be hit in its attempt to achieve those targets? It is a shame that many communities whose library has been under threat, having developed a range of opportunities, such as reading programmes, writing groups, language classes, internet access, family learning activities and much more, are once again threatened with a reduction in opening hours of up to 50% in some cases. Surely those facilities must be given the time to develop and the opportunity to prove themselves and their worth to each community.

Many villages and towns across the Province are undergoing the master plan process. The Minister will know that, for some of those villages and towns, that process is well developed, with plans published and actions under way. All our Departments and agencies are being brought into the plans and are intent on delivering for communities. One example is Whitehead, which is a rural community in my constituency. Surely in a case such as Whitehead, with a newly refurbished facility, it is premature to consider a substantial reduction in opening hours while all agencies in that area are deliberating on how they can deliver a

sustainable community infrastructure for the town. It is clearly the wrong message to send out to residents and other agencies that may use the facilities in that town for the delivery of services outside the box. Whitehead is only one example of that type of community planning, which is also ongoing in other areas of the Province, and I appeal that, in these circumstances, reviews are halted and community plans are allowed to develop. I urge the Minister to take appropriate action to ensure that the facilities and services of all our local libraries are sustained with as little disruption as possible.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the proposer and seconder of the motion. It is apposite and important that we discuss this issue and, indeed, the amendment today.

Ms Ruane suggested that this is perhaps a premature debate. I do not believe that it is, and I base that on what happened in Belfast last year, when 14 libraries were looked at and 10 were shut, some of which were in the most disadvantaged communities in Belfast such as Sandy Row, Andersonstown, Whitewell, the Braniel and the Belvoir estate. Therefore, it is very important that the House marks and puts its view forward.

Libraries are an important community resource in a number of ways, not least because the original design was to make books available to the population. Books are expensive, and disadvantaged communities and those facing poverty are not able to afford books in the household. Libraries provide that access. That was understood 100 years ago, and, at that time, the construction of the Carnegie libraries played a huge part in ensuring the literacy of our population. Those libraries have continued to deliver that service ever since. It remains an important factor that households that do not have the disposable income readily to buy books, which are expensive, have access through libraries.

It is not simply about books; it is also about new technologies. A number of homes do not have computers for their children as they grow up, and those children are, therefore, at a disadvantage vis-à-vis those in more fortunate households. There is also an issue with the age of the population in the Belvoir estate, where the library was shut last year. Its population has a high proportion of elderly people who used the library and the books. However, they were also able to access computers — the so-called silver surfers — and the internet and avail themselves of the advantages of that resource. There are issues in a number of areas where libraries continue to provide an important service. They are not something of the past but are very much of the present and the future.

I can go only by our experience in Belfast in places such as Sandy Row, where the library hours were reduced to save money, the visits were reduced to match the library hours, the library hours and staff numbers were reduced to match the opening hours and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is what happened in Belvoir, Sandy Row and other libraries.

I realise that there is a different regime in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), and I see that, of the 10 libraries under threat, eight are under review. I welcome that, and I acknowledge the Minister's role. She is bound to have had a role in that, bearing in mind that libraries and Libraries NI are 100% funded by the Department. However, I have a concern that, as we look to keep libraries open, that is not

the whole story. We need opening hours that are adequate to deliver the service to ensure that visitor numbers stay up and the local community is properly served. I am not a particular fan of mobile libraries, and I have noticed that, although Belfast gets mobile libraries a couple of hours a week or a fortnight to try to plug the gap, the local community has difficulty accessing them. I do not believe that they are in any way, shape or form a proper substitute for a library in position.

I realise that we are in challenging budgetary times, and that is why my party and I voted against the Budget. You are now looking at the consequences of the Budget that was voted through. There is not enough money to run the service and the system, and we are into prioritisation. On the issue of an urban/rural divide, closing 10 out of 14 libraries in Belfast and saving eight out of 10 in rural areas —

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

Mr McGimpsey: That appears to be something of a rural/urban divide. I am not for a second arguing that any library should close in a rural area. In fact, we should look to keep as much as possible of our resources together and functioning.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important matter. It is an issue of direct concern to people in my constituency. Libraries play a vital role in our communities, provide an excellent service throughout the country and offer much more than just lending books. Today, libraries are often the social centre of our communities, providing a resource for all, from children and young people through to elderly people and the most vulnerable members of our society.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way on that point. Does he agree that it is strange that no statistics regarding, for example, levels of class visits, children's activities or cultural and heritage activities were taken into account in the consultation? Furthermore, does he agree that those activities are at the core of the modern library service, as described by Libraries Northern Ireland itself?

Mr Dunne: I concur fully with those points. They are well made.

We all recognise that, regrettably, libraries cannot be immune from budget cuts. Many areas across Departments have been subject to budget cuts. However, despite the pressures on budgets, it is vital that, with any changes, the level of service is maintained. Libraries currently provide an excellent service to the people of Northern Ireland, and that level of service must be maintained.

Under the planned reduction of opening hours, the people of north Down are set to lose 31.5 hours of library service provision between the three libraries in Bangor, Hollywood and Donaghadee. That is a significant reduction for the people I represent and will result in libraries having to, as the motion states:

"curtail their ability to deliver an efficient and effective service".

Bangor, as the main town in the constituency, has a relatively new flagship library, which, over many years, was campaigned for with the South Eastern Education and Library Board. It is a modern building that complements the

old Carnegie library and is situated in a prime town centre location within walking distance of several main schools in Bangor as well as the local regional college. That resource is used extensively by schoolchildren and young people, and is one of the best used in Northern Ireland. To have its opening time reduced by eight hours is of great concern.

Hollywood's recently updated and developed library is another excellent popular town centre resource. It has broadened its appeal in recent years and is well used by the local community. Hollywood library is among the hardest hit by reduced opening hours, with a reduction of 13.5 hours a week. Donaghadee is also set to be a victim of the cutbacks, with a reduction of 10 hours in its opening time over the week. The library in Donaghadee is another well-used and popular service that is at the backbone of the local community.

The benefits that libraries bring to the local community are vast, and it would be tragic if many of those benefits were reduced or even scrapped due to funding issues. It is especially an area of concern because those who rely most on a library service are often the very young and the older population.

4.30 pm

Libraries promote invaluable literacy and lifelong learning to those who otherwise would not be able to learn. They provide collections of the rich cultural history of our land. They also provide a meeting point for local communities and groups to enjoy educational and social activities. They are at the heart of the local community, with readily available resources such as IT systems, newspapers and books for those who may not otherwise be able to access such valuable resources.

We need to do all that we can to ensure that the level of service is maintained. It is imperative that today's libraries can meet the needs of the local community. I join the Assembly in expressing my great concern about the reduction in opening hours of our community libraries. I support the motion.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, welcome the motion. The importance of the debate to our constituents cannot and should not be underestimated. Local communities are finding the loss of local services to be increasingly common. We are hearing about many community centres, post offices and local shops disappearing from towns and villages. Now, with libraries facing reduced opening hours, and some even closing, there is a risk that the sense of community, which we as elected representatives should be doing everything to promote, could be perceived as being eroded.

I certainly support the motion and encourage the Minister to act accordingly in the light of the debate. There is the rural/urban debate, which we have already had today. The libraries in my North Antrim constituency are highly valued, as Mr Swann spoke about at length. Many of the libraries are rural and will be most affected by a reduction in opening hours. For people in those areas, accessing libraries, especially in the evening, will become increasingly difficult.

The library space is important to those communities in so many ways. In times of high unemployment, a library provides an important resource for people looking for work. In a time when some of the most socially disadvantaged find

academic success increasingly difficult to achieve, libraries provide a vital tool for studying and learning before and after school.

Therefore, at a time when we are losing a lot of our public services, we have to draw a line somewhere and acknowledge the significant role that libraries play in our communities. Ultimately, this goes to the heart of the question about what sort of a Northern Ireland we really want to live in, because one very important function of our libraries is to promote learning. Statistics show that over a quarter of people visiting libraries cited that their reason for visiting was to accompany their children. That should be actively encouraged, especially when research shows that parental engagement with children improves performance significantly, no matter what the child's socio-economic background is.

One recent statistic that comes to mind is that 15-year-old students whose parents often read books with them during their first year of primary school show markedly higher scores in tests than students whose parents read with them infrequently or not at all. Therefore, we have to think very carefully before denying those people that free access to our libraries.

Everybody in the House can see that Libraries NI is —

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member mentioned the significance of parental involvement with children. In an age when a lot of children's social activities are increasingly dominated by the Xbox and other video games, the opportunity for them to embrace learning through reading is also vital. We are in danger of creating a society of children with the best developed thumbs in western Europe but with minds that may be lagging a little bit behind. That is one of the key reasons that we need to protect our libraries.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention and commend him on his skilful approach to his place. I could not agree more. We are not down on Xboxes or modern technology, but statistics prove that there is no replacement for a good book. Free access is what it is all about. I encourage the Minister to look at that. I understand why, fiscally, this is an obvious target, given that there is a £31.5 million budget in Libraries NI. However, we have to be careful not to take a short-sighted view.

In conclusion, I was fascinated by Ms Ruane's comments about women and changing life patterns. I want to bring it to her attention that 80% of library workers are women, so the reductions will have a huge impact on the working lives and independence of employees in the library system. Even if it is for no other reason than that, the Minister should think very carefully about these plans.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That certainly added a new dimension to an intervention.

Mr Allister: Libraries are wonderful places. Reference has been made to the fantastic contribution of the Carnegie libraries. They have contributed more to this society than many other much more vaunted institutions. Therefore, when we see the libraries in our community being put under threat, each one of us should be particularly exercised.

I also have a particular soft spot for libraries — maybe I should declare an interest — because it was in the Queen's University library that I first asked my wife to go out with me. That is enough sentiment.

Mr McGlone: Was she a librarian, Jim?

Mr Allister: She did end up as a librarian. *[Laughter.]* She was a student at that time. Enough sentiment.

Ms Ruane's contribution was interesting. She told us that we should not politicise the issue of libraries. Coming from the Minister who probably did more to politicise a Department than any Minister we have ever had the misfortune to have in this country, that was pretty rich. Someone who turned schoolchildren into political footballs and allowed their transfer procedure to be kicked up and down this Province should not be lecturing anyone about politicising these matters.

Mr McMullan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have gone away from the debate altogether.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will confine himself to the subject of the motion.

Mr Allister: The point that I am making is that how we deal with libraries is, of course, a political issue, because at the base of this is the question of cuts. Perhaps that is why there is some Sinn Féin sensitivity about the issue. Today, Sinn Féin is in the business of having to defend £10.2 million of cuts. Of course, if there were a parallel situation in the Irish Republic with cuts to libraries, which there may be, Sinn Féin would be at the exact opposite end of the argument. The expediency of the moment requires Sinn Féin to defend these cuts, but in another place it would be the most vehement attacker of them.

My real concern for the libraries that will suffer a reduction in hours is that, ultimately, that should not be a means of bringing about their closure. There comes a point of viability at which, if you squeeze a library and its facilities to below a level that is survivable, you make the continuance of that library questionable. I fear that there could be a stratagem to ease, by a thousand cuts as it were, the eventual demise of some libraries. We all have to be particularly vigilant to ensure that the resource that we should value in our communities — be it in my local village of Kells or elsewhere — is defended. "What we have, we hold" is a phrase that comes to mind. That is and was the resolve of many of the marvellous campaigners who secured such attainment in the library campaign against the closure of the 10 libraries that were earmarked to go. I salute them in that regard.

The Minister is prepared to squander money on far less deserving causes. The libraries have suffered enough from reductions; they need the protection that the essential funding gives them. We cannot push libraries further than 18 hours. Indeed, I fear for some that have been pushed so low. In north Antrim, we have already been through this with the North Eastern Education and Library Board's swingeing cuts in 2005. Happily, we saw off the most recent attempt to go even further. However, one has to be ever vigilant in that regard.

Mr D Bradley: Does the Member agree that the pledge regarding consideration being given to increasing opening hours should money become available is of little

consolation and that consideration is no substitute for a real commitment? Does he also agree that reduced opening hours may, in fact, never be increased in future and that it may sound the death knell for many smaller libraries? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Allister: The honourable Member has been around for long enough to know that he should take the assurances that we have been given with a huge pinch of salt. When you hear talk about consideration being given to increasing library hours, we all know that that is but a comfort blanket wrapped around a proposal of cuts and diminution in service. I trust that no one will be too much deceived by that.

Libraries are worth keeping and are worth fighting for. Of course, the Minister's IRA thought that it was right in 1993 to bomb the Linen Hall Library. I trust that she will take the opportunity today to condemn that wanton act —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I remind the Member that he must be extremely careful about his remarks in the Chamber.

Mr Allister: I have finished. Thank you.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister, who, I am sure, is delighted that romance can kindle in libraries.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Not only am I impressed with that, I was impressed with the way in which Peter Weir jumped from his seat to his feet for an intervention and back again. I was very impressed with his agility.

Mr Weir: I was trying to demonstrate to the Minister a full grasp of the culture, arts and leisure side of things: not only do I have the cultural bit, I am obviously embracing the sporting element of DCAL as well.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that the 50-metre pool in your constituency will get great use.

I thank the Members who brought forward the motion and the amendment. The people who raise this issue do so because of their genuine concern for libraries; some sit on the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. It is right that these debates are used to highlight concerns about the future direction of the library service. That library service will and should help to build a more educated society, a more skilled society and a stronger society. That was raised during the debate. I also believe in the value of the public library service. I am committed to ensuring that Libraries NI provides a comprehensive and efficient library service in accordance with the legislation and in line with what we can afford.

DCAL's ambition for the library service is set out in the 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' policy, as people also mentioned. It was published in July 2006 and will be reviewed early in the new year. One of the central tenets of the policy remains relevant, particularly to the debate; it talks about the continued development of public library services. Indeed, some Members will know of the work that reinvestment has seen through capital funding, for example, in the Whiterock, Falls, Shankill and — David is not here — Carrickfergus areas. Work is ongoing in Dungannon library.

I think that everybody is aware of the challenges that face each Department. Certainly, nothing is rosy in the garden in respect of DCAL's budget. The recent budget settlements

have meant that all our public services will face difficult challenges, and we will have to make very difficult decisions.

Libraries NI is no different: it has to live within its budget under these difficult circumstances. The Committee has met representatives of Libraries NI. They are good and genuine people, and I do not think the first thing on their minds was to reduce libraries' hours straight away.

4.45 pm

Every one of the 13 or 14 Members who has spoken said that the consultation is ongoing. It will end on 2 December. Members mentioned their local libraries, but I cannot go into detail on specifics. However, I am sure that every Member will know of the proposed reductions in their constituencies.

I do not believe in consultation for consultation's sake. That is one point that Karen McKeivitt made that I disagree with. During the previous consultation on proposed closures, there were campaigns in constituencies and communities. Those successful campaigns, which were driven mostly by communities, led to eight libraries being reprieved. Those eight, as others have pointed out, will survive when action plans, issues and challenges are addressed in order to make their libraries more sustainable. I believe that that was the result of a very strong consultation process.

Some very good points have been raised, and I urge those who made them to take part in the consultation. You cannot make a change unless you take part. When people have taken part in consultations involving Libraries NI, that body has made a difference, and it has listened. The four parties here — Sinn Féin, the DUP, Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP — have members on the board; it has non-councillor members as well. I am sure that the people sitting on that board are hearing exactly the same things. It is not the case that these debates happen and have no impact.

Some points that have been mentioned have real relevance. David Hilditch was not the only Member to make the point that running a series of consultations has potential to cause confusion. I accept that. People who want to save and protect front line public services in the community no sooner finish one set of consultations than they begin another, and then another. That is very taxing on people who are trying to save what they regard as a valuable and valued service.

I feel for the staff in these circumstances. I have met staff representatives, I have met Libraries NI, and I know that staff have been consulted throughout the process.

Some issues that have been raised are ideal for consultation, for example rurality. Michael McGimpsey spoke about closures in Belfast. It is not as if that happened when any of us were asleep. However, the closures happened very quickly and the consultations had been and gone by the time people were aware of the impact. This is slightly different. I do not want to contradict myself; I appreciate that there has been plenty of consultations, but I would rather look at consultation than look for it. We should do anything that we can as elected representatives to assist people. However, issues such as rurality and equality impact assessments are key. A full equality impact assessment will be carried out at the end of the consultation period. The issues that have been raised are central, and will be focused on throughout.

I will take some points that have been raised, such as what happens if the proposals to reduce library services are upheld. Does that mean that there will be a viability implication? These questions need to be fed into the consultation. We have to focus on the needs of communities. Libraries are not just about borrowing books; we have heard that throughout the debate. They are also about internet access for younger and older people.

Robin Swann quoted a parent who could not afford to buy a computer and used the library to access the internet and help with homework.

People use libraries when searching for jobs. Libraries, particularly in areas which are very deprived, are sometimes the only way that people have access to getting beyond their circumstances or moving on.

Many Members have paid tribute to the staff. I think that that goes without saying, but I am sure that staff who read the Hansard report will be heartened to see the support that they have. The Committee Chair mentioned, as did other members, that the Committee will be meeting Libraries NI and have been meeting them throughout these consultations. I think it really is important. In these debates, you can make all sorts of points or whatever; I am not even going to get into them. I take people at face value: they do not want to see a reduction in the opening hours, even though they understand the implications it that has for the budget. However, here is the issue: if more money were made available, Libraries NI has already made it known that that would probably assist in a decision to reverse the reduction in opening hours, but that money will have to come from somewhere else in my Department and, when that happens, we will be back here again for another debate.

So we need to look at where we can take the money from; where will those potential reductions be made? Obviously, I have no doubt that I and other Ministers will be here again over other issues as the months roll on. That is a decision that I need to make. It is not fair that I should throw out a comment like that and say, "There you go, that is the challenge that we have to meet".

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will surely.

Mr I McCrea: I have no desire to make a political point whatsoever. I understand that, in any of these departmental budgetary issues, you have to take money from somewhere to pay for things. However, would the Minister not agree that, as important a resource as libraries are, there is an opportunity to work with other agencies, local councils and community groups to try to find other means of funding to ensure that the very thing that she refers to does not happen?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his intervention. He has almost anticipated what I will say. It is not that I want to pass my responsibility — or our responsibility — on to other agencies, but eight libraries have been given a bit of a reprieve. Here is an example of where you can use a joined-up approach, for example, in your constituency in Cookstown, to provide community and library services. Anna Lo made the point with reference to her own constituency. There are many other examples where people work together, predict what the needs will be in the community and try to provide an almost holistic approach.

Having said all that, I will always bid for more money where it is available. I value libraries; I value every aspect of my Department and will always make a bid.

Let me thank everyone who has commented in the debate. The remarks made here will be made on the board, in the communities and in many other places. I urge people to feed into the consultation, and I assure them that it has been rural-proofed. I understand the master plan process and the ongoing rural development process, and that should also feed into the consultation vis-à-vis the equality impact assessment at the end of it.

I thank everyone who has spoken. On behalf of the Committee Chair, I have absolutely no doubt that the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee will keep this issue very firmly in focus, because libraries — particularly but not exclusively for rural areas — are at the heart of the community. Any erosion of, or impact on, them is not only an unpopular political decision to make but has the potential to make a big impact. People should use the consultation to outline those impacts. I thank everyone for their contributions and support thus far.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar an leasaithe anseo inniu. I thank the Minister for her input. The Committee will certainly discuss this with Libraries NI again; we have done so in the past. Libraries NI has listened to the representations made by elected members, the community and their own staff. How we deal with the staff is certainly a concern of mine. There is a degree of uncertainty among staff members, because there will be no renewal of temporary contracts from 31 March 2012. There is no security of tenure for existing staff, regardless of their length of service. All of that means that there can be no guarantee that there will be no ad hoc closures due to staff shortages.

What strikes me about the proposals is the inconsistency. The opening hours of Dungannon library have been rightly increased by five and a half hours. However, in my constituency and yours, Mr Deputy Speaker, the hours of Limavady library and Coleraine library will be cut by one third; that concerns me.

There seemed to be a degree of unanimity among Members. One thing that we are sure of is that people are passionate about libraries. Indeed, Jim Allister might be passionate in libraries, but that is another story. *[Laughter.]* I think that he is really an old romantic at the bottom of it all. Libraries have been an integral part of life for many of us. In my working life, I have been lucky enough to work in buildings that also housed libraries. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Limavady Borough Council's offices are based in the same building as Limavady library. I also worked in the Workhouse Museum in Derry, where a library is based. I know quite a number of members of staff in those libraries, and I know the passion that they bring to their job in dealing with people and the community.

Oliver McMullan, the proposer of the amendment, rightly pointed out elements of the rural development programme, which, hopefully, will bring saviour to Carnlough library, for which he has campaigned very hard. Robin Swann is legendary for his campaigning on Kells and Connor library. I am sure that he was very relieved at the announcement that

it will not close immediately, given that that was one of his manifesto promises.

Caitriona Ruane spoke of our national celebration of writers. We are very proud that such a small island has produced so many world-class writers. She said that women want to use libraries at times when they are not open; that was a useful point well made. Likewise, the Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure touched on libraries' opening hours and on mobile library provision and the related consultation.

David Hilditch rightly talked about the development of community plans. William Irwin talked about the change in libraries' uses. Michael McGimpsey summed up the concern that there must be adequate opening hours to deliver the service. David McIlveen bemoaned the loss of public services. He pointed out that 80% of the library workers are women and outlined the effect that that might have.

It has been a very worthwhile debate, and I do not believe that it is premature. I have encouraged as many people as possible to take part in the consultation, and I continue to do so. I believe that Libraries NI will listen to us. I have talked to its interim chairman and to Irene Knox, and they are passionate about what they do and the service that they deliver. I hope that we will come to a suitable and acceptable resolution on the issue.

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

Mr Ó hOisín: I beg support for the amendment. Let us continue to provide the same level of service and usage of libraries.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm achoimriú a dhéanamh ar an rún. I am pleased to wind on the motion. As I said earlier, the SDLP is happy to accept the amendment.

5.00 pm

The library in my native place is at the centre of the village. It is widely used and is popular with all sections of the community and with surrounding rural communities. It has strong community partnerships with organisations such as Sure Start and with local primary schools. There is even an active heritage group attached to the library. It is a family-friendly place and is used particularly well by families whose children enjoy the frequent children's activities there.

Although the library is open only 24 hours a week, there is an exceptionally high level of community involvement. By analysing the actual number of transactions performed, indications are that the library is very busy. In the event that the proposed reductions in hours are implemented, the building will still stand there, will still be fully stocked, and the utility bills will still be paid.

As the library is currently staffed only around 50 hours a week, no significant savings will be made in staff reductions. In the overall library budget, the savings will probably not even register on the financial Richter scale, yet the impact on the community there will be widely felt, and the years of work spent in making the library so popular and so well used will be seriously undermined. The people who have used the library for many years will receive a diminished service and limited access, and community activities there will be diminished, if not ended.

At a time when money is tight with so many people, the library should be available to everyone, with the same level of service enjoyed by all users, not just those who are lucky enough to live beside bigger libraries. I would argue that retaining opening hours and staffing levels of libraries, such as the one that I described, would be a better use of public money than reducing hours to save a minimal amount of money and having an excellent facility standing unused for most of the week.

Statistics show that libraries that are open 18 hours a week have substantially fewer issues than libraries that are open 24 or more hours a week. The highest annual issues for a library that is open 18 hours a week is around 18,000, while a library that is open around 24 hours a week has annual issues of around 30,000. Therein lies the difference.

No staffing hours were published, but if staffing hours are reduced as well as opening hours, we can expect a corresponding decline in the level of customer service that can be delivered by such a library. Users will have less access to library services, and it is possible that some users will be deprived of the service altogether. The levels of community involvement will also be impacted on, and Libraries NI, as I mentioned earlier, has a vision of modern libraries being at the centre of the community, assisting people to attain their full potential. It is highly unlikely that that will be the case if a library's opening hours are reduced to 18 hours a week. In fact, there is a strong likelihood that those reductions will result in a two-tier delivery of library services.

Smaller libraries will struggle to deliver a basic library service with minimal community involvement, while libraries with longer opening hours will have the time and the staff to deliver a far superior service with no restrictions in the level of service to which their users have access. Eventually, users of smaller libraries will migrate to the nearest larger library, and that may be the unforeseen effect of the reduction in opening hours, probably resulting in the eventual closure of many smaller libraries.

It is my opinion that the criteria used to make decisions on the reduction of opening hours were neither fair nor equitable. At best, they were confusing, and, at worst, they were deceiving to library users who were willing to take part in the consultation process.

As I said, the 80,000 threshold of annual activities places libraries that were open for less than 80 hours a week at a severe disadvantage from the outset. It would be impossible for even the busiest libraries to attain that level of activity within limitations of annual visits, annual issues, use of public access terminals (PATs) and active borrowers.

The annual count was taken over only one week, and the methodology varied between libraries, with bigger libraries using an electronic counter and smaller libraries doing a manual count. Many of the libraries that had been allocated 30 hours a week were dependent on visitor numbers, not actual customer transactions, to achieve those hours. There is no evidence that all visitors to a library were there specifically to use the library facilities. In fact, closer scrutiny of visitor figures compared with levels of issues, public access terminal use and active borrower numbers would, in some cases, leave visitor numbers very much open to debate.

It was only after the matter was raised by public representatives that the number of public access terminals

in each library was made available. Although the library service is keen to promote library involvement in the community, no statistics regarding the level of class visits, children's activities, or cultural or heritage activities are published. Those activities, as I said, are at the core of the modern library service, so it is extremely odd that they were not taken into consideration in the criteria used in the consultation.

The consultation document was worded in a manner that confused many of those who responded. The statement regarding bigger libraries having more hours because they are busier is very misleading. Many smaller libraries are just as busy. Take the case of the library in my native place, which I mentioned earlier: it is currently open 24 hours a week, and it has six terminals. Last year, there were nearly 30,000 issues and 4,646 annual public access terminal sessions. It has 1,582 active borrowers. Had Libraries Northern Ireland provided further analysis of those statistics, it would have revealed that the library issued 23 items every opening hour last year and that the public access terminal statistics revealed an uptake of PAT use of 62% of the total hours available.

The nearest big library issued 27 items an hour, and the PAT statistics reveal that 44% of the total hours available were utilised. Total issues were 75,000, and there were 37,000 public access terminal sessions. At the time, there were 30 public access terminals in that library. Active borrowers in the larger library were 5,700, and the library was open 55 hours a week, which is more than twice the weekly opening hours of the smaller library. Conclusively, the smaller library is comparatively as busy as the larger library. As we mentioned earlier, the pledge offering increased opening hours, should money become available, holds little substance.

From what I have said, it appears that the process used to collect and analyse data was flawed and very much skewed against the smaller libraries. As a result, we can conclude that Libraries NI's proposals for a reduction in hours in smaller libraries are unfair and inequitable and need to be revisited.

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

Mr D Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. They need to be revisited with a view to producing a fairer and more equitable outcome for the smaller libraries.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the decision by the board of Libraries NI to initiate a review of eight of the 10 rural libraries that were originally earmarked for closure; expresses great concern about the reduction in the opening hours of small community libraries which will curtail their ability to deliver an efficient and effective service; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to take action to ensure that the excellent service provided by these libraries is maintained.

Adjourned at 5.10 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 22 November 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Employment and Support Allowance (Work-related Activity) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

That the Employment and Support Allowance (Work-related Activity) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

The regulations put in place a new requirement for employment and support allowance (ESA) claimants in the work-related activity group to undertake activity that will help them to move closer to employment. The regulations build on the provisions that already exist to require employment and support allowance work-related activity group claimants to attend work-focused interviews. The regulations will enable work-related activity to be required at the discretion of specially trained employment advisers in the Department for Employment and Learning.

Work-related activity is an activity that helps the claimant to obtain work, remain in work, or be more likely to obtain or remain in work. Following on from the work-focused interviews, the employment adviser will agree on a personal action plan with the claimant, with the primary aim being to help the person to move into or return to employment as quickly as possible. For some claimants, that might be quite straightforward and the transition to work can happen very quickly. For others with more complex health barriers to employment it might take longer, and claimants might need to avail themselves of services and programmes to help them progress towards employment before they are ready to make the full transition back into the labour market.

The Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) disability employment service has made programmes and services available to help those with health- and disability-related barriers to work. They include the condition management programme, which is a voluntary work-focused rehabilitation programme funded by the Department for Employment and Learning and managed by the disability employment service, which aims to help claimants on incapacity benefits to return to and to sustain employment; Workable (NI), which is a programme to assist those with complex disability-related barriers to employment to find and to keep work; Access to Work (NI), which offers individually assessed long-term or one-off support to help a disabled person to carry out their job; occupational psychology

service assessments, which enable those with disabilities to have a comprehensive employment assessment, to examine their strengths and weaknesses in relation to work and to gain guidance on suitable employment and support needs; and formal training for disabled people in residential settings to meet the needs of those trainees who are unable to progress in mainstream training environments.

I will now explain briefly the changes that will be introduced by this statutory rule in the context of the existing requirements when someone makes a claim for employment and support allowance. Since 2008, most employment and support allowance claimants have been required to attend a work-capability assessment, which looks at what customers can do in relation to work and identifies whether it is reasonable, in light of their physical or mental condition, for claimants to engage in work-related activity. Claimants who cannot undertake work-related activity are placed in a support group and will not be covered by these new regulations. Those claimants assessed as able to carry out work-related activity are placed in the work-related activity group. Until now, being in the work-related activity group has simply required claimants to attend regular work-focused interviews. Many claimants welcome that engagement with advisers, and it is important that support is provided to individuals with a limited capacity for work to allow them to take real and active steps to improve their chances of securing employment.

I think that we would all agree that it is not acceptable to write people off on a lifetime of benefits because they have a health condition or a disability. Indeed, many of those with health conditions can sustain and make progress in employment. There are people in Northern Ireland who are trapped in poverty and worklessness often over several generations; that cannot be ignored, and it needs to be addressed. Evidence shows that work is good for physical and mental well-being, that it can be beneficial for individuals with health conditions and disabilities, and that being out of work can contribute to poorer health and other negative outcomes. It is important that claimants with health conditions get the support that they need to prepare them for a return to work, and that, in return, claimants who are capable of undertaking steps to prepare for a return to work should do so.

The regulations provide for a written action plan that will record and monitor actions that claimants are expected to take. The nature of any work-related activity will be agreed in consultation with claimants, and advisers will work closely with them with an emphasis on identifying what activity will work for individual claimants. That activity will always be reasonable, realistic and relevant to claimants' special

circumstances, with an overall aim of helping claimants to move closer to a return to work.

It should be noted that claimants will not be required to undertake medical treatment, nor will they be required to apply for or to take up work. However, claimants will be expected and encouraged to take up the support that is offered and to participate actively in their journey towards employment. There will be an emphasis that, for most people, employment and support allowance is a temporary benefit, and a reinforcement of the principle that with the receipt of benefits comes personal responsibility.

Employment and support allowance claimants in the work-related activity group receive a work-related activity component, which reflects the efforts that they are expected to make in seeking opportunities to improve their employment prospects.

Receipt of that top-up is dependent on their undertaking the activities that are required of them. Carrying out work-related activity as directed reflects just such a demonstration, and so will, via this legislation, become a condition of receipt of the work-related activity component.

If a claimant fails without good cause to undertake activity as instructed, a decision will be taken on whether that failure calls into question their continued receipt of the work-related activity component. If it is decided to impose a penalty, the work-related activity component will, in the first instance, be reduced by 50%. If, after four weeks, the claimant has not demonstrated that they have re-engaged with the work-related activity, reduction in the work-related component would increase to 100%.

Claimants will always be provided with the opportunity to show good cause for failing to carry out work-related activity. However, this legislation does not include a long list of suggested acceptable reasons for failure, as might have appeared previously, and this does not, in fact, in any way reflect a tightening up of acceptable reasons — quite the opposite. It emphasises the flexibility that is available to decision-makers in using their discretion to judge each case on its merits. The claimant will always have the capacity to reinstate the work-related component of their benefit by re-engaging with their adviser and undertaking activity, either as previously instructed or through a suitable agreed alternative.

Active engagement with the labour market represents the best opportunity for the future for those claimants with some capacity to work. Taking practical steps, in the shape of carefully considered work-related activity, is the best route towards that goal. Allowing flexibility for advisers in supporting claimants — while establishing a fair but effective framework around responsibility and sanctions — will be the first step in transforming employment and support allowance into a forward-looking, active benefit that balances support, obligation, flexibility and conditionality.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Committee has agreed to support the statutory rule. I will outline some of the points that the Committee dealt with thoroughly.

The Committee regards its scrutiny role as very important, and it has been thorough in examining this issue over the

past months. Indeed, at its meeting on 2 June this year, the Committee had its first sight of, and considered, the proposed statutory rule. I can safely say that all members of the Committee came at this against the backdrop of what are, in many cases, their fundamental concerns about British Government proposals for what they call welfare reforms. People are sceptical about many such proposals, which come from a policy that is ideologically driven from London. Notwithstanding that context, which it is important to set out in the House, the Committee had fundamental concerns about how this statutory rule may be implemented.

Committee members' important primary concerns were around whether staff who will carry out some of those interviews will be sufficiently trained or skilled to recognise difficulties in respect of mental health issues of, for example, bipolar disorder, depression, autism or such illnesses. Committee members were concerned that the officials carrying out work-related interviews will not be sufficiently skilled in those matters to make proper assessments.

The Department came back with responses, and the Minister has outlined some of those assurances. The Committee was given assurances that DEL staff will be properly skilled and have had to take certain training modules. On the basis of the assurances that were given, the Committee agreed, on 8 September, to support the statutory rule being laid.

10.45 am

Mr P Ramsey: Further to the Committee Chair's point about specially trained disability advisers, I chair the all-party group on learning disability, and, for a long time now, people have been deeply worried about the fact that there are not sufficient numbers of disability advisers to adequately deal with the range and complexity of disability issues across all the constituencies in Northern Ireland. Does the Member concur that that is the case? Will the Minister give an absolute assurance that the Department will look into that to ensure that the issue is addressed?

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member for his intervention. He makes a very important point. That is why Committee members — my colleague Mickey Brady was most vocal on the issue — considered the issue at length and questioned departmental officials about it specifically. We were given an assurance.

I have to put on record the fact that many members of the Committee have serious concerns about the process by which people arrive at work-related interviews. Indeed, it is safe to say that there have been a number of reports in the public domain quite recently in which the organisation Atos Healthcare has been severely criticised. Members of the Committee, therefore, sought an assurance from the Department and directly from the Minister that the people who conduct work-related interviews, the principle of which no one has any difficulty with, are properly and appropriately trained to make sure that they conduct their assessments and their work with claimants with the highest integrity. Having been given those assurances, the Committee, as I said, unanimously consented to the statutory rule being made. Of course, given that the Committee takes its scrutiny role very seriously, it will seek to monitor how that is delivered in the time ahead. The Committee endorses the statutory rule, despite the reservations that I outlined

and to which the Member referred, and which the Minister sought to address in his opening remarks. The Committee will continue to do that.

I will wear my party cap for a moment or two. Our party, including our Members on the Committee and the rest of our party colleagues, is very concerned about the issue. As I said, we are very focused on the fact that the so-called welfare reform programme is being ideologically driven by the Government in London. It is about driving down benefits, expenditure and so on and so forth. In the first instance, it is an attack on people who claim benefits. That being said, my party wants to work with the Department and the Minister. Indeed, my party colleagues and I will meet the Minister shortly after this morning's debate. We want to work with the Department and the Minister to see how we can alleviate the most negative impacts of some of the changes coming down the track. We will, of course, have to discuss many of them in the House in the time ahead.

My party is very anxious to make sure that the people who are entitled to benefits get them and that the people who require and want support to get back into work get the appropriate level of support from, in this instance, the Social Security Agency or staff in DEL. We will continue to monitor that.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that it is content that the rule be made. The Committee is determined to monitor that in the time ahead to make sure that what the Minister assures us will happen does happen.

Mr Easton: Will the Minister explain how employment advisers will decide whether claimants are required to undertake work-related activities?

Mr Speaker: Order. I just want to try to get the procedure in the House right. There are no questions to the Minister, because it is not a ministerial statement. It is a statutory rule, which is treated more or less like a Bill as it travels through the House. There is no time limit on what we are dealing with this morning. Does the Member want to carry on or has he finished?

Mr Easton: I just wanted a bit of clarification on that small issue.

Mr Durkan: Like the Chair of the Committee, I wish to speak with my party hat on.

My party also has issues with the whole onset of welfare reform and, in this respect, with the migration of claimants from incapacity benefit to ESA. We should welcome any measures to ease that transition for vulnerable people. It is important that we do what we can to get people who are able back to work. There is no doubt that some people abuse the system. That needs to be rooted out. However, we are concerned that the new system will abuse other people. We are concerned that, given the inordinately high percentage of incapacity benefit recipients in the North compared with that in the UK, people will be deemed to be able to work when they quite simply are not.

As more and more welfare reform legislation comes to the House, debate will become less about party politics and all about parity politics. The legislation that we debate today is certainly not punitive when compared with other stuff that will be coming over the hill. We support the regulations.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Chairperson said, many reservations were expressed in Committee. After it sought reassurances from the Department, the Committee endorsed the statutory rule. Basically, these regulations deal with people who actually reach the stage at which they have work-related interviews. The difficulty is how they reach that stage. That relates to the work-capability assessment, which, I accept, is a different issue. Perhaps it needs to be dealt with another day. However, those issues are linked. It is difficult to get away from that.

Since 20 June 2011, Atos, the private company that has carried out work-capability assessments, has come under a lot of criticism. Indeed, last night, part of a news item on Channel 4 highlighted that. Recently, I dealt with a constituent who underwent one of those assessments. That person was deemed not to have mental health problems because, according to the healthcare professional, who was a nurse, not a doctor, they did not appear to actively rock back and forth in the chair during the assessment. I received a copy of that report. It is bizarre to say the least.

I urge the Minister to consider that. In its response to the Committee's reservations on that particular legislation, the Social Security Agency stated that it is fully committed to high standards of decision-making. So it should be. It went on to state that it has in place specific training packages for decision-makers and a decision-making forum in which staff can share best practice. Again, that is how it should be. However, although I accept that it is a different issue, the Minister should address the fact that people arrive at interviews for the work-capability assessment because they have been assessed through particular tick-box exercises.

Mr McCausland: I thank Members for their contributions. I am, indeed, pleased that, as the Committee Chairperson outlined earlier, when the matter came before the Committee, it received support from all of the political parties, albeit with reservations and concerns about how all of it would work in practice. That cross-party agreement is valuable and important. I thank the Chairperson for the positive way in which the Committee has dealt with the regulations.

Individual Members raised a number of points. In particular, the question was raised about the training of staff, especially on mental health issues. DEL, which has responsibility for work-focused interviews, advises that staff in jobs and benefits offices and jobcentres are fully trained to deliver the work-focused interview service to claimants. The pathways employment service advisers and team leaders undergo a health and disability module, which is delivered by the Department's occupational psychology service. It covers the area of mental health and employment. That was enhanced in preparation for the introduction of ESA to cover more severe mental health issues such as psychosis and very severe depression.

The Disability Employment Service recognised the need for advisers to be provided with skills and a framework to provide support to claimants who are at risk of suicide. Consequently, it procured PIPS programmes to deliver a programme of suicide-awareness training to all pathways advisers and team leaders across the DEL network. The Department's occupational psychologists worked closely with pathways teams to offer support on a case-conference

basis, analysing and discussing the most complex cases such as mental ill health. Advisers can also refer such claimants for occupational assessment in order that suitable jobs and support needs are identified. DEL has been instrumental in building links between specialist disability organisations and the pathways adviser teams in order that claimants with conditions such as mental ill health can avail themselves of local and appropriate support as and when necessary. That is included —

Mr F McCann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes, OK.

Mr F McCann: I have a couple of points. Alex said that, at the Committee, we asked the Department to reassure us that all eventualities would be covered. However, quite a number of organisations that deal with people with mental illness and disabilities are seriously concerned about the progression of the legislation, and some people raised a concern that, when people are sent to jobs to bring them back into the workforce, they are being paid £10 a week for stacking shelves in supermarkets. Do you not think that that might be doing somebody out of a full-time job and allowing businesses to get workers on the cheap?

Mr McCausland: I will conclude the point that I was about to make, which was that, as part of the staff training, a number of mental health organisations, including Action Mental Health and Mencap, have made presentations to and had discussions with advisers in local offices throughout the year.

A lot of the focus is on mental health; that seems to be the area about which there is most concern. That is understandable because it can be difficult at times to understand the mental state of a person who comes into an office because, quite often, such conditions can fluctuate. A person may have a particular state of mind in the morning and be different in the afternoon. There are fluctuations even within the day. So, there are concerns about mental health problems, which are particularly prevalent in Northern Ireland, and, as the Member will know, there is a much higher level of mental health issues in some constituencies than in others. I assure the Member that, as far as possible, I am confident that considerable concern is being given to this and that considerable efforts are being made to ensure that, if people have mental health difficulties, they will be taken into account as far as possible.

I am sure that, as time goes on and as we work at this, issues will crop up —

Mr Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: I will just finish this point. I am sure that, as the work goes on, people will come across issues where things do not work out as they should, and lessons can be learned from that. When any change happens in any system, there are always difficulties and hiccups on the way. We need to make sure that we learn from those, and, if there are cases where the system does not operate as it should, it is important that they are brought to the attention of officials so that they can be looked at and so that lessons can be learned.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for giving way. Could the Minister give similar assurances as he gave on the mental health issue about conditions with fluctuating degrees of severity such as Parkinson's disease and MS?

Mr McCausland: I am sure that the Member will appreciate the point that I have just made that, when any new change takes place, there are always difficulties and hiccups on the way and lessons to be learned. It is important that those are learned. So, I assure the Member that there is an awareness of the importance of not only mental health issues but other issues as well, and the Member has highlighted one in which the condition of the individual changes from time to time.

I assure the Member that good cause for not being able to attend and, perhaps, the appropriateness of some work will be taken into account.

11.00 am

Work-related activity was raised as a point, and, in the initial statement, I emphasised that any work-related activity would have to be reasonable, realistic and relevant. Fra McCann asked whether someone being put into work would do someone else out of a job. I am not aware of the wages that are to be paid to people, but, obviously, if you were to put someone into a situation, there would be fewer hours of work for someone else. I will ask officials to look at that issue, and I emphasise that some of it is more the responsibility of DEL than the Department for Social Development (DSD). We will encourage a look at the nature of the work that people are put into. Quite often, when people have been out of work for a very long time and the skills base needs to be built up, it is difficult to find the work that is most appropriate for them.

Members raised the issue of disability advisers, and I will speak to the Minister for Employment and Learning about that. Mickey Brady raised points about work capability assessments. I am meeting some folk after the debate about that, when we can discuss those matters.

Alex Easton asked how employment advisers would decide when to require a claimant to undertake work-related activity. The defined work-related activity for fresh claimants is that they have to go through six work-focused interviews. Following on from the work-focused interviews, the adviser will agree a personal action plan with the claimant, with the primary aim of helping the person to move into or to return to employment as quickly as possible. Therefore, the disability employment service will have in place a support model consisting of disability employment managers and occupational psychologists. They provide the advice, support and guidance to the advisers who serve the claimants in the jobs and benefits and jobcentre network. They will also deliver training and coaching on topics such as disability awareness, addressing barriers to employment, caseload management and so on. That support will enable advisers to make evidence-based decisions that may result in a claimant being able to take part in work-related activity.

I trust that I have dealt with the issues that Members raised, but, if I have inadvertently failed to do so, I will write to them in due course. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Employment and Support Allowance (Work-related Activity) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

This order, under section 84 of the Land Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, seeks to adjust fees charged by Land Registry to ensure that the fees cover the costs of registration activity. That is in line with the requirements of the Act. The fees set down in the order will replace those that are currently in force under the 2010 fees order.

Members will wish to note that the statutory rule itself is brief. It increases fees that, in accordance with the statutory regulations, have been endorsed by the Land Registry rules committee, chaired by a High Court judge and including representatives of the Bar Council and the Law Society of Northern Ireland. I hear Members tittering behind me, and I am not so sure that that is an endorsement, but that is how it has been endorsed. Under the Land Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, there is a legislative requirement for Land and Property Services, in relation to registration services, to recover fully the costs of the service provided.

Recent indications are that income in this financial year will not cover costs. The shortfall is due mainly to a decline in workload as a result of the depressed property market and to a fall in property prices. Lower property prices result in lower registration fees. There has also been an increase in the registration directorate's apportionment of departmental costs for administration services provided to Land and Property Services (LPS). Those factors, together with the increases in salary costs for registration staff due to the recent equal pay settlement, outweigh the efficiencies previously achieved in LPS.

The draft order will increase registration fees by up to 20%. However, it will retain a discounted fee for applications that are submitted electronically via the e-registration method. E-registration has been a great success. The increase in take-up has risen from 15% to 73% in-year. The e-registration system enables solicitors to make applications online, and it contains validation processes that assist in ensuring that the applications are complete before they are submitted. The system has benefits in registration services for the solicitors who use it, as well as for citizens, as it ensures that registrations are carried out more efficiently. The e-registration system has improved the applications that are submitted. It has enabled LPS to make efficiencies in postage and staffing, as well as facilitating quicker turnaround times. It is, therefore, important that the new scale fees retain that incentive to ensure that the efficiencies that have been made already are fully realised.

Following the completion of legislation earlier this year, except for a small minority of cases, the Land Registry will no longer require the lodgement of land certificates to complete property transactions. It is anticipated that that will speed up registration processing time and reduce LPS overheads for the storage and management of documents. Some customers may still wish to use land certificates and request new certificates in situations where, for example, land is subdivided. However, to support the implementation of the earlier legislation, which will facilitate full electronic

registration, it is proposed to levy enhanced fees for the production of new land certificates, updates to existing land certificates and the issuing of certificates of charge.

Other charges include an increase from £3.50 to £4 for the standard search fee. There will be an increase of 50p for copy maps and documents, excluding uncertificated copy folios. The fee for section 53 applications, which are very complex, will be increased to £250, and the fee for any application that requires a registrar to rule on any matter will be increased to £200. The proposed changes will result in the fee for the current average house price sale rising from £240 to £300. Members should, however, note that that fee is £90 less than the average £208 fee for a house sale transaction that existed when properties were selling at considerably higher prices.

Higher property prices generate greater fees for Land Registry, and considerable efficiencies have been introduced to registration services to drive down the costs and overheads of the organisation. Members should also note that the proposed order will have the lowest scale fee for home registries for properties that are being transferred in the maximum price bracket.

Although I consider that any fee increase should be avoided where possible, I am content that the draft order strikes the right and fair balance. I am also content that it is continuing to encourage fee reductions for applications lodged in electronic format, which will continue to drive further efficiencies and deliver improved customer services. In line with the convention of giving the legal profession prior notice of the implementation of new fees, I propose that the new order come into effect from 1 February 2012.

My Executive colleagues and members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel were advised of my intention to make the statutory rule. No comments were received on the proposed introduction. The Committee was content with the statutory rule. Therefore, I recommend that the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. The policy proposals contained in the statutory rule were considered by the Committee on 21 September 2011. The Committee noted that the rule seeks to prescribe land registration fees to ensure that, as far as is practicable, they are set at a level that will produce an annual amount sufficient to pay all salaries, remuneration and other expenses relating to the operating costs of the Land Registry, which is part of Land and Property Services.

The Committee formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly today on 9 November 2011, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Land Registry (Fees) Order (NI) 2011 be affirmed by the Assembly. Therefore, I support the motion.

Mr Girvan: I, too, affirm the motion. I agree that the cost of delivering the service must be covered by the fees received. In light of the comments made by the Minister about the downturn in the housing market and the resulting revenue reduction incurred, I see no alternative to the implementation of what is, in the overall scheme of things,

a small proportion of the purchase price of a property or the transfer of the deed across and registration thereof.

This has probably been the only course of action that we could take. Processes have been put in place to improve efficiency in the Department to ensure that the digitisation of maps and the transmission of that have improved, as well as the establishment of the e-registration process. It is good to see that solicitors are availing themselves of the e-registration process, which means that they can pass on the reduction in cost and save money for their clients. It is good to encourage people to use and take advantage of that portal.

The DUP supports the motion.

Mr Wilson: I am pleased that there has been consensus of support across the Assembly for the regulations. I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel and its Chair, Conor Murphy, for the positive manner in which they have dealt with the statutory rule.

In my opening comments, I made clear the reasons for the proposals. The service is sold to the public and, of course, is of benefit to those who are purchasing properties. Like any other service that is available from professional sources, it has to cover its costs; it is not subsidised. That does not mean that we have been lax in the costing of this service. We have sought ways of driving efficiencies through the system. We have cut staff, and we have looked at ways of reducing overheads. The use of e-registration has been one of the big ways of reducing overheads. That is in addition to the other efficiencies that would have been passed on through the normal savings that LPS would have been required to find.

I thank Members for their support and commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

11.15 am

Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

That the Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

The order, under section 16 of the Registration of Deeds Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 seeks to increase the Registry of Deeds fees in line with the rise in the overall costs of delivering services. The fees set down in the order will replace those currently in force under the Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

The 2007 order introduced zero charging for records prior to 1 January 1990. That was set on the premise that the searching of those records would continue to decline over time. The volume of searching has not declined as expected, and the continued use of records has necessitated investment to replace the memorial microfilm and microfilm readers, which are now beyond repair. To offset that investment, the new fees order will include charges for permits, which will allow searchers to access pre-1990 records on a daily, monthly or annual basis.

The draft order proposes to increase many of the registration fees by £2. For example, the fee for a special certificate of registration will increase from £13 to £15; a certified copy memorial that was filed under the Registration of Deeds Act will rise from £15 to £17; and the fee for registration of an entry for satisfaction of a mortgage will go up from £8 to £10. Other proposed changes include searching fees. Electronic records that have been filed since 1 January 1990 will now include a fee of £7 for every set of up to 90 results where the customer searches via the internet. Where the customer searches via the agency's facilities, a fee of £10 for every set of up to 90 results will be incurred. In addition, the fee for a common or negative search is to increase from £25 to £30.

The fee increases will ensure that the costs of delivering the Registry of Deeds services are covered by the fees charged. I confirm that consultation has taken place with the Law Society of Northern Ireland. In line with the convention of giving the legal profession prior notice of the implementation of new fees, I propose that the new order will come into effect on 1 February 2012.

My Executive colleagues and members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel were advised of my intention to make the statutory rule. No comments were received on the proposed introduction. The Committee was content with the statutory rule. Therefore, I recommend that the Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire arís. I again thank the Minister for his remarks. The policy proposals contained in the statutory rule were considered by the Committee on 21 September this year. The Committee noted that the rule seeks to prescribe the fees to be taken in respect of documents lodged for registration in the Registry of

Deeds and of entries, records, examinations, inspections, certificates and copies that are made and other matters that are done in that registry under the Registration of Deeds Act. The Committee did not have any issues to raise in respect of the policy proposals.

The Committee formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly today at its meeting on 9 November 2011 together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (NI) 2011 be affirmed by the Assembly. Therefore, I support the motion.

Mr Girvan: I, too, support the motion that has been put forward by the Minister. I thank him for bringing it to the House this morning. I appreciate that some of the figures that have been mentioned are modest. We appreciate that, in this time of austerity, we are attempting to just cover the cost of delivering the service. In doing so, we have attempted to keep everything at as low a level as possible. As far as the Committee is concerned, I agree with the Chair. I was present at that meeting, and I agree that that was the case. On behalf of the DUP, I support the motion.

Mr Wilson: Once again, I am pleased with the consensus of support across the Assembly for the regulations. Again, I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel and its Chair, Conor Murphy, for the positive manner in which they have dealt with the statutory rule.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Private Members' Business

Sports Clubs: Rate Relief

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

Mr Swann: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the benefits which community and amateur sports clubs bring to local communities; notes the vital role which they play in encouraging participation in sporting activities and the contribution they make in promoting healthy lifestyles; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to raise the rate relief afforded to these clubs from 80% to 100% to ensure parity with equivalent clubs in other parts of the UK.

I thank the Business Committee for allotting time for me to raise the issue, and I thank the Minister for his presence. It is with great pleasure that I bring the motion to the House. I do so not without care and consideration but after conversation and consultation with a number of the main sporting bodies in Northern Ireland: the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Irish Football Association (IFA). However, rate relief is also a priority for many small, community-based sports clubs. I saw an opportunity to bring their requests for rate relief equality with their counterparts in other parts of the UK, under the community amateur sports clubs (CASC) scheme, before the House today, and I am aware that I am not the only Member to have been approached by one if not all of those representative bodies on the issue. I am also aware that it is high on the list of priorities for the all-party Assembly group on rugby. The motion is also timely, in recognition of the announcement by the BBC this morning of the possibility that Northern Ireland may face an "obesity tsunami" in our young people. The motion could in some way tackle that as well.

The Programme for Government that was launched last week makes several specific commitments for sport over the next few years: to develop sports stadiums, as agreed with the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby; to host the World Police and Fire Games; and to host a significant golf tournament. That is all very commendable, but what is missing is the recognition of the benefits of sport and leisure to the longer-term health and well-being of our society. Commitments to increase support for grass-roots participation are also lacking.

Unfortunately, my colleagues and I are not able to support the amendment at this stage. However, that is not to say that the situation may not change during the debate, depending on the comments made by Mr Hamilton and his colleagues. We feel that "to examine" is not the same as "to raise", but of greater concern is the fact that the amendment would not even commit the Assembly to keeping the status quo.

The amendment is not strong enough and weakens the proposal to the point at which the Department of Finance

and Personnel (DFP) could roll back on prior decisions on rate relief. Having brought the motion to the House, I would find it hard to stomach if our amateur sports clubs could face less than 80% rate relief as a result. I am sure that Mr Hamilton will reassure me otherwise, but I and my colleagues, before we could support the amendment, will need to hear how long such an examination would take and how soon we could work with clubs to increase the benefit of sporting activity using the finances that would become available to local clubs.

I pay tribute to the vast amount of work being carried out by the main sports governing bodies in setting their targets on participation. We need to be equally supportive in this place. I also pay tribute to all the parties in the Assembly that recognised the value of grass-roots sports in their manifesto. I hope that they demonstrate that here today by supporting the motion.

Sports clubs play an essential and significant role in the development of sport in Northern Ireland. Clubs impact on sport by providing opportunities for participants to enjoy positive sporting experiences, and they provide environments where, in partnership with governing bodies and other agencies, young athletes can be supported to realise their full potential in their sport. In all, 29% of 16- to 17-year-olds and 59% of 11- to 16-year-olds are members of at least one sports club. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the clubs are operated by enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers who perform a range of coaching, management and administrative roles, as well as many others. It is estimated that 37,233 volunteers dedicate their time to formal volunteering opportunities in sports clubs, of whom 18,095 are involved in at least one a week. A conservative estimate of the monetary value of the contribution made by volunteers in sports clubs is that it is in the order of £180,950 a week or well over £9 million a year. The Sport and Recreation Alliance's findings support the proposition that government's investment in supporting the sporting voluntary sector has a return of up to £30 for every £1 invested.

The previous Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure carried out an inquiry that came to the conclusion that the Executive needed to champion participation in sport and physical activity and ensure that all relevant Departments were assigned targets for facilitating participation opportunities under the next Programme for Government. The Committee recommended that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should invest more of its budget on preventive health measures that involved participation in physical activity as a means of reducing obesity-related illness and the associated financial cost to the health service over future years.

We should also note that the positive health and well-being from participation and social interaction goes far beyond simply addressing obesity and has a major impact on positive mental health. Mr Weir said yesterday that there was a danger that we could produce young people in Northern Ireland with the most able thumbs if they only rely on Xboxes. That is why we want to support amateur sports clubs: to get those young people not just into our libraries but out on to the sports fields.

Mr Weir: Obviously that is an issue that my colleagues will develop later, but I expressed concern that we would have a generation that are very skilled with their thumbs and

nothing else. One of the problems is that, if we carbon-copy what is in England, we will actually get lots of sports clubs spending their time filling in an enormous number of forms because what is there in England is not automatic across the board but is discretionary. That is one of the areas that will need to be looked at. I am sure that my colleagues will develop that point when they speak on the issue.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his intervention. My colleagues will likewise expand on that subject later, so I hope that he is still here to pay attention.

The previous Minister, Nelson McCausland, addressed the Committee as part of that inquiry and stated:

"As the Committee will be aware, Sport Matters estimates that an additional £134 million will be needed over the next 10 years to achieve all the aims of the strategy. It also recognises that no one organisation can singlehandedly meet that shortfall. All public, private and voluntary stakeholders have a role to play. However, it is important for central government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to set the example. If the Executive are to fulfil their commitments to sport and physical recreation in Sport Matters and deliver the wider benefits, Ministers and Departments need to look imaginatively at ways of supporting each other practically and financially."

The Current Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in response to a question I asked last week, said:

"One of the contradictions that sports clubs have pointed out to me when I have met them is that, because many of their sports are not funded, they must fundraise, particularly for additional activities. They spend most of their time fundraising. They did not volunteer to be fundraisers; they volunteered to be coaches, to wash kits and to turn up and do whatever they can. I do not know how that balance will be struck for many of those clubs, but I encourage Sport NI to take a more prominent role in helping clubs. Some pressure needs to be taken off them so that they can get on with doing the work that they want to; after all, they volunteered and gave up their free time to do that."
— [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p349, col 2].

Sport NI, in its report 'Bridging the Gap', states:

"Sport and physical recreation, including the provision of quality sports facilities, can have a profound effect on peoples' lives, whether it's future athletes being inspired by world-class performances, or older people and women becoming more active. It also plays a role in improving health and well-being, education, and contributes to improving social cohesion."

The report also identifies the current lack of provision needed to meet that demand, a shortfall of 142 badminton courts, six swimming pools, 612 tennis courts, three athletics tracks and 2,221 acres of grass pitches, which could be 829 grass or 207 synthetic sports pitches or a mixture of the two. We recognise the demand. We also recognise the financial constraints within which we operate.

Sports governing bodies in Northern Ireland want to develop their sports and the infrastructure. They recognise the financial situation and want to play their role. The motion is about starting the process of working smarter with a joined-up government to get to the point that we all want to reach.

11.30 am

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "Personnel" and insert

"to examine the rate relief afforded to these clubs."

I thank Mr Swann for tabling the motion. In moving the amendment, I will split the motion into two parts. At the start of the motion, there is recognition, and at the end, there is a call to action. In my speech, I will deal with aspects of the motion, but probably more so towards the end.

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

All Members will subscribe, wholeheartedly and 100%, to the first part of the motion, which stresses the obvious value of amateur sports clubs to society in Northern Ireland. We watch sport on television and see professionals at the height of their game, but we sometimes forget that the backbone of sport in Northern Ireland, as in any society, is the amateur sports club. Amateur clubs have by far the greatest number of members and are rooted in every community in Northern Ireland. Were it not for amateur clubs producing talent, professional clubs at the higher end of the game would not be able to do their job. We focus on the big money-making teams and forget that were it not for the bedrock of amateur sport, the professional end would not be there at all.

I have seen that in my constituency. I see some of the volunteers about whom Mr Swann spoke, who freely give up their time for nothing other than love of the sport in which they are involved. They give up not only Saturday afternoons but week nights; sometimes they give up entire weekends for trips to away matches. There is an admirable dedication that we should wholeheartedly support. It can be seen at a local level. I saw it when I was Chair of the Social Development Committee. Under that Department's remit for volunteering, I found out just how big the sector is. One way or another, tens of thousands of people are involved.

On a personal level, my eldest son, although he is only five years old, goes to an amateur football club once a week to train, and hundreds of kids, from five to 15 years of age, go to that club to train every week. Were it not for that club and others like it in the locality, goodness only knows where some of those older kids might be and what they might be doing. We should all recognise that issue. Amateur sports clubs play a key role not only in promoting health, combating obesity and maintaining good physical fitness but in ensuring a more stable society in Northern Ireland.

There is no dispute with the first part of the motion, and there is not much dispute with the sentiments of the second part.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I agree entirely with his comments on the role of local sports clubs in the community. Does he agree with me that, particularly in urban areas, they can provide a huge resource in giving young people a diversionary role and directing them away from negative elements in the community to a positive situation?

Mr Hamilton: The Member is absolutely right. It is no coincidence, for example, that a lot of midnight football is played in urban areas. That distracts kids from things that they may be involved in — or could become distracted and

get involved in — and engages them in an activity that they all love and can unite around. Certainly, sport plays a key role not only in our towns and cities but across Northern Ireland.

I will make two general comments on the second part of the motion before I make a specific point, and I hope that the Member and his colleagues can unite around the amendment rather than the original motion.

There are risks involved in singling out good causes. We all recognise amateur sport as a good cause, but there is a risk in the Assembly asking for automatic rate relief, or some automatic action, that will cost the Executive money. All sorts of good causes could be singled out, and every one of them would be seen as worthy and deserving. Very soon, there could be an exceptionally complex rating system, and millions of pounds would have been given up.

That leads me to my second general comment about the costs involved. It is estimated that through the 80% rate relief, about £4 million is given to amateur sports clubs in Northern Ireland. It would cost about £1 million if that percentage were increased. Some might say that £1 million is not a terribly large amount of money, but in the context of all the reliefs that are offered by the rating system in Northern Ireland, we have to acknowledge that there is a cost there. The motion does not deal with that; that is not a weakness in itself but it is an issue. There are only two ways to deal with it. You either forgo the revenue and say that we, as an Executive, have £1 million less to spend on all sorts of things or you put the burden on to some other ratepayers.

Mr McClarty: Does the Member not also agree that there is a cost in not doing it? The health and well-being of young citizens would be adversely affected, and that would have an impact on our health service.

Mr Hamilton: You could make that argument with virtually anything. You could say that there is a cost in not doing something in relation to all sorts of causes. I go back to my first point: before you know it, you have chipped away at your rating system and made it more complex in the process.

The value of amateur sports clubs to society has been recognised in the relief given to sports clubs. It was recognised in 2004 when the relief that they received was extended from 65% to 80%. We give lots of reliefs to all sorts of organisations, particularly businesses. Indeed, some amateur sports clubs benefit from small business rate relief at the minute.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I want to continue.

They will benefit further from the extension when we pass the legislation in the House.

The tail end of the motion refers to bringing us into line with the rest of the UK. As an avowed unionist, that is something that I always look to do. I am always keen to have parity with the rest of the United Kingdom as often as possible. However, in this instance, I am not convinced that it is entirely to the benefit of amateur sports clubs in Northern Ireland. I will explain why.

Amateur sports clubs in Northern Ireland get 80% relief automatically. As long as it is an amateur sports club

without any professional aspect, it gets that relief. That is not the case in Great Britain, where the system is very complex. Amateur sports clubs in Great Britain have to jump all sorts of registration hurdles with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). They have to register as a charity or with Community Amateur Sports Clubs, an organisation that advises its members that doing that is sometimes not necessarily to the benefit of a club.

Mr Weir made a valid point in his intervention. A lot of people who are involved in clubs do it for the love of the sport. They know that there is some administrative burden on them. When we took through legislation on the registration of clubs last term, my experience was that people involved in those clubs do not want more and more administration and bureaucracy pushed on them. Having to register with HMRC or the Charity Commission would do that. We have to bear in mind that, for that reason, it may not be in the interest of some clubs.

The issue with the 20% additional discretionary relief is that it is discretionary and not always applied. Indeed, a great number of clubs in Great Britain do not get it. In some cases, the local authority uses its discretion, and restrictions are put on membership and the membership fees charged, which takes you into a whole debate about what is a worthy sport or club and what is not.

To say that we should move to 100% automatic relief as in the rest of the UK is not accurate, hence the amendment put forward by me and my colleagues that we should examine the rate relief. Our argument is that the system in Great Britain is not necessarily to the benefit of clubs.

Mr Swann: Mr Hamilton, will you give me an assurance that you will not look at it the other way and go back to 65% rate relief?

Mr Hamilton: I heard that point being made, and I intended to address it in the final minute that I have. As far as I am aware, there is no intention to do that. The Minister can answer much better than me, although perhaps it will be my responsibility at a later stage. There is no intention to go in the opposite direction. The fact that the rate relief increased from 65% to 80% shows that there is recognition of the value of amateur sports clubs.

Our point is that the GB system is much more complex and discretionary than our system. Clubs in Northern Ireland may be better off with a guarantee of 80% than a hope of 100%. Indeed, some already benefit from small business rate relief, and they will continue to do so.

The Member is a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, and he mentioned the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) quite a lot. In taking the issue forward, there is an onus on DCAL to come forward with evidence to back up the case.

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

Mr Hamilton: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. If DCAL brings that evidence to the Finance Minister, there will be every scope to look at the issue and to look at getting a system that will be to the benefit of clubs, not to their detriment.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I cannot disagree with much of what the previous two

Members who spoke said. Let us face it: sport is good for society. Health benefits are accrued from it and it gives young people a focus in their lives. As Mr Humphrey said — *[Interruption.]* Sport takes young people off the streets when they may be involved in other activities that would have a negative impact on communities.

I speak with experience from my own club, and I suppose that I should have declared an interest as a member of the GAA. Every Saturday morning, you go along, and there are 150 to 200 kids between four and 14 years of age, and volunteers give up their time willingly to help to coach those young people, to take them to matches, to provide kits for them and to provide transport to matches. However, the difficulty is that, in the current climate, the cost of new kits for amateur sporting clubs has gone up, as have the costs of heating clubs, providing electricity and fuel for transport. Therefore, amateur sporting clubs are in a difficult position. It is not just the GAA. I do not want to focus solely on the GAA. Every weekend, soccer clubs and rugby clubs do the same. Amateur boxing clubs are another resource in our community, particularly in deprived and disadvantaged areas in Belfast. They take the kids off the streets at night, train them, provide a healthy lifestyle and give them a focus in their lives.

We all know of the health benefits of being involved in sport. Mr Swann mentioned the report on the radio this morning, which suggests that an obesity tsunami will be coming down the tracks in five or 10 years. We have everything that is associated with obesity, such as stroke, cardiovascular disease, certain types of cancer, and so on. Unfortunately, in the report by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2010, Sport NI reported that participation in sport and physical activity is actually falling. Mr Swann also said that the Executive need to champion sporting and physical activity. One way of doing that is by providing 100% rate relief.

Of course, we need to look at the cost, and there is a cost in everything. The argument was developed to a certain extent about the dividend from any investment made in sport. My belief is that the dividend from a relatively small investment in amateur sporting clubs will be immense. We do not want added bureaucracy, and I am sure that there is some way of developing a system that can be easily resolved by amateur clubs.

We support the motion, and if it is not contradictory, we also support the amendment.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún atá faoi bhráid an Tionóil inniu. I support the motion. I declare an interest as a member of St Patricks Gaelic Football Club, Carrickcruppen.

As previous Members who spoke said, sports clubs make a huge contribution to our society, which benefits all of us in many ways. Obviously, physical activity contributes greatly to health and well-being and saves society millions of pounds annually. More importantly, it saves hundreds of lives. On the other hand, physical inactivity is costing millions of pounds, year on year. The more people we can encourage into sport and physical activity, the more money we will save and the more lives we will improve and save.

11.45 am

This is about more than simply saving money. Sport and physical activity improve people's lives in so many other ways. They improve people's mental health; create social capital, which is the cement that binds society together; and create a more cohesive society. Those who participate in sporting activities that are provided by sports clubs benefit from the physical activity, but they also learn other important skills. They learn values like teamwork, loyalty and selflessness, which, in turn, are transferred into other areas of their lives, such as family, school, workplace and community. Those have a multiplier effect that gives tremendous added value to society as a whole. Although those who participate in sports activities may learn their skills on the field of play, they do not pick them up off the ground. It is through the interest and hard work of dedicated coaches who voluntarily give of their time and effort that they gain those skills. That in itself is a priceless contribution to our society.

Our young people are the main but not the only beneficiaries of sport, which can lift them out of cycles of inactivity and into positive healthy trajectories, which, in turn, improve their mental, physical and emotional well-being. The benefits of sport are not confined to young people. Across the age ranges, people benefit from the work of sports clubs through engaging in physical activity, but also through the social and cultural interactions and outlets that clubs and organisations provide.

It is impossible to place a monetary value on all those benefits but if it could be done, it would amount to a vast sum of money. Although the debate is, to some extent, about money, there are more important things involved, which are beyond the reach of money and which cannot be bought and can never be paid for, regardless of the contribution that government makes, welcome as it is. No government scheme, no matter how well designed and marketed, could replicate the work of the amateur sports club or organisation, fuelled as it is by the enthusiasm of the individual for the game and funnelled through the group activity of the club.

However, government has a role, and it is not to try to colonise the activity of the amateur clubs and organisations. That would be wrong, even it were achievable. In my view, government's role is to act as a catalyst to provide the resources that can make it easier to make things happen. Government has contributed very usefully and generously to sports development here through Sport NI, which falls within the remit of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure; neighbourhood renewal, through the Department for Social Development; and physical education and coaching schemes in the Department of Education. I am sure that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has contributed through various community relation initiatives. This is an opportunity for the Department of Finance and Personnel to make a further contribution by extending rate relief for sports clubs to 100%.

Mr Hamilton said that there is a cost to all of this. I hope that I can deal with that. In 2010, 77.6% of rates debt was achieved.

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

Mr D Bradley: That exceeded the 75% target by 2.6%, which was an increase of around £2 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr D Bradley: If we can continue to lessen rates debt —

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

Mr D Bradley: — we can use the money gained to pay for this measure.

Mr Lyttle: I, too, congratulate the proposers of the motion, and I welcome the opportunity that it presents for the Assembly to recognise the contribution that community and amateur sports clubs make to the health and well-being of men, women and children across Northern Ireland. I also welcome the call that it makes for additional support for our clubs, but I, too, would prefer that we afford the Minister an opportunity to examine the proposals in more detail.

As an amateur soccer player, with, admittedly, ever-decreasing success levels, and as a coach and a committee member, I am acutely aware of the vital contribution that volunteers make in our community and sports clubs. As has been mentioned, it is very often the local social or amateur sports club that is the hub of the physical and social activity of a community. It is a place where many people sacrifice their time and effort to ensure that our children and young people gain values and skills that allow them to achieve their true potential. It is also a place where lifelong and community-based learning allows people to achieve self-esteem and routes to employability that otherwise would not have been possible. I believe that, as an Assembly, we must be passionately concerned to do all that we can to ensure that that contribution is both recognised and resourced so that such positive experiences and outcomes can be delivered to as many people as possible.

We heard about obesity in the news today, and recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer also suggest that adults in Northern Ireland take part in at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times a week. However, the reality is that closer to 35% do so, meaning that little over a third of our population comes close to achieving those targets. If we compare those figures with 57% of Australians and 70% of the Finnish population, we begin to understand part of the reason why our health system is struggling to meet demand. We need to support our volunteers and communities to help us to change that scandalous situation. We must, therefore, recognise the preventative role that regular participation in sport can play in reducing the cost of inactivity to the health service, as well as the significant well-being and employability benefits that it can bring.

I have been fortunate to be involved in participation for most of my life. I am aware of the excellent community and sports clubs in my constituency, East Belfast, including Ridgeway Rovers under-12 soccer team, which recently defeated Swords Celtic to become all-Ireland champion in its age group. I had to get that mention in there.

On a serious note, it is that type of exchange and achievement that serves to highlight the important role that clubs play in the social fabric of our communities. The benefits of well-resourced community and sports clubs can be wide-ranging. Only last week, the Minister of Culture, Arts

and Leisure highlighted the significance of volunteering in Northern Ireland and outlined the Department's efforts to increase opportunities throughout the region. The Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs reports that its own private-member, non-profit-making sports, social and recreational clubs provide volunteering opportunities for around 6,500 people. Figures reveal that clubs also provide job opportunities for many more. It has also been mentioned that enhancing and developing community cohesion is arguably more relevant in our community than in any other area of the UK or Ireland.

For all those reasons, I congratulate the proposers of the motion but I also accept that the amendment would afford the Minister of Finance an opportunity to properly examine this important issue and, I hope, return to the House with a full statement on improving community and sports club rate relief as a matter of urgency. I ask the Minister, and, indeed, the Executive, to consider in his examination the wide-ranging benefit that community and sports clubs deliver and to ensure that we offer them the fullest support possible.

Mr Girvan: I support the amendment. The motion highlights the benefits of sport to our community and is a good opportunity for the House to debate those benefits and the amateur clubs that deliver them. Those benefits are wide and varied.

I just asked my colleague beside me whether a darts club would be classed as amateur. There are a number of things about the motion that we need to look at seriously. We cannot look at the matter as being one for the Department of Finance and Personnel in isolation. As already alluded to, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has a key responsibility in identifying which clubs should, or should not, benefit from rate relief. I appreciate that we have moved from 65% to 80% rate relief across the board without putting clubs through all the bureaucracy. For those clubs that are able and have the capacity to fill in forms, tick boxes and ensure that they have the correct registration, we have taken an approach that allows 80% rate relief across the board.

Mention has been made of what has happened in the rest of GB. Having had experience with some of the clubs based there, I can say that it is quite evident that they have a number of hoops to go through before they can achieve 100% rate relief. Not a large percentage does, and local authorities have some involvement in that as well. From that point of view, there are aspects that we need to look at seriously.

The costs associated with this would remove a certain amount of money from use in other areas. I am not saying that we have to throw the baby out with the bath water. However, some of the revenue generated could be used to support our hospitals, roads and schools. Rates are our only tax-gathering power in Northern Ireland, so we have to make very good use of them. We cannot hark back to what happened in the days when we received everything from the Exchequer in London. If we were able to fund this, it would be a penny out of —

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that there is a cost when a large number of people do not participate in sport? It is reflected subsequently in ill health and in our health systems. There is a cost to the public purse if we do not encourage participation in sport.

Mr Girvan: I appreciate that, and I take on board that there are health benefits from being involved in sport. There are also health risks for those involved in sport. It depends on who is taking part. For instance, if you want to play rugby with me, I might end up slightly worse off. I look round the Chamber and I notice, with interest, that people have declared their involvement in certain clubs. Sometimes, I wonder whether that involvement is in only the social aspect of the club, and I say that with tongue in cheek.

I believe that there is merit in our having the debate today. We should not look at the Department of Finance and Personnel in isolation because other aspects need to be examined. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was present this morning, and I appreciate that if people get involved and engage in sport, they can offset some of the illnesses that they may have in later life. There are great benefits to be gained from that. We should not take only a broad brush approach on this matter; there are private clubs that generate revenue due to paying members, and there are those that have a commercial aspect as well, in that they generate revenue from the hire of their facilities. All those aspects need to be considered. I think that the issue has to be looked at in the round. I still feel that we have taken the proper approach as regards clubs having 80% rate relief. I am not ruling out a full review to see whether there is a way to include other clubs and other ways of increasing rate relief for them. They can take advantage of the charities aspect, and I know that a number of them have done so.

12.00 noon

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I endorse the sentiment of the motion, and I congratulate our Ulster Unionist Party colleagues on tabling it. My party looked carefully at the motion and considered tabling an amendment. However, we decided simply to address our questions in the context of the debate and on the basis of supporting the motion. The amendment is constructive and helpful, and we will support it.

I will follow up on some of Paul Girvan's comments. If Members think about it, they will see that the reference to community and amateur sports serves to give them a broad definition. The Minister may give us some examples of the difficulties that such a broad definition might create. We should accept from the beginning that the differential between 80% and 100% rate relief will not make a significant difference to programme spend for the Executive. Indeed, we should factor in the cost of collecting those revenues and measure the health and social benefits of amateur club membership, as Members have repeatedly addressed. I am a lifelong member of the Seán Dolan's Gaelic Athletic Club in Derry. Therefore, I know the benefits, and Member after Member can testify to them. There is no difference between us on that. However, we might want to reflect on practical or operational issues, and the amendment provides that breathing space while allowing the parties in the Chamber to express their positive intent. This is a positive motion, and it is meant to address an issue that has health and well-being implications for our entire community. On that basis, we should find the ways and means to support it.

As Members have said, there are different types of club. We know about workplace social clubs. Over the years, such

clubs emerged out of the industrial era that our economy experienced a generation ago. Nevertheless, some of those clubs continue to exist and have taken on different forms over the years. It is a necessity that we look at whether the existing system can be improved by providing additional relief. However, we might create additional problems that have not manifested themselves yet. If possible, we should establish the cost benefits as well as the social and well-being benefits, and doing that will take an assessment in the round. Therefore, my party supports the amendment.

I hope that the Members who tabled the motion will consider the note of caution that is being sounded and take another look at the motion. We may find ourselves involved in disputes and arbitration processes over which clubs are entitled to qualify. At the end of the day, it might end up being more costly than we had originally intended. We should try to preserve the original intention and find a way of moving forward.

Mr Humphrey: I declare an interest as a member of Woodvale Cricket Club, although I am long since retired. I thank the Members who tabled the motion, and I support the amendment.

The issue of 100% rate relief has been raised before, particularly by the GAA in a co-ordinated lobby in 2005-06. That lobby was followed equally effectively by the lobby of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and the Orange Community Network about the derating of Orange halls and community halls such as scout halls. I declare an interest as a founding member and a former board member of the Orange Community Network who was involved in that lobby. In the Orange fraternity, over 200 activities exist across the 600 halls in Northern Ireland, and 4,500 groups operate in those halls. Orange halls were, obviously, the very first community centres.

As other Members have, I commend the clubs that work — particularly in an urban context — in socially deprived areas on interfaces and close to interfaces for all the diversionary work that they do. It is absolutely vital. At the outset, I pay tribute to the clubs in my area, including Shankill United FC, which got to the semi-final of the Steel and Sons Cup this year and were beaten by a wee amateur team called Bangor FC. I also pay tribute to Woodvale FC, which won the IFA Junior Cup this year; Albert Foundry FC, which won the Clarence Cup in 2010; and, of course, Woodvale Cricket Club, which reached the Northern Cricket Union Junior Cup final and were beaten on the last ball. They were robbed. I also pay tribute to the former Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for the amount of work that he did in ensuring that sports facilities and investment in those facilities were high on the agenda and for recognising, as he did on many occasions, that the provision of sporting facilities is vital to addressing the problem of obesity in Northern Ireland as we go forward.

We must remember that the rates relief scheme does not apply to bars and restaurants in amateur sports clubs. Members mentioned that the 80% rates relief that clubs get is the same as the mandatory relief that exists in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, that is not an entirely true and accurate picture. In GB, the mandatory relief is 80%, regardless of the membership fee, and clubs qualify regardless of paying policies. That has been the case since 1978. To gain the 80% rates relief, clubs must be non-profit-

making, engage in sport and have no professional players. It is important to remember that 100% rates relief in GB can depend on the local authority; it is not a universal or blanket policy. Therefore, whether clubs get 100% relief and are exempted from paying the extra 20% depends on local government.

Mr Swann: In the Minister's review, which may come forward, is there a possibility that the decision on whether that 20% is granted could be taken away from local authorities and dealt with directly by the Department?

Mr Humphrey: I am sure that, in summing up, the Minister will deal with your point. The position that I have set out relates to the mainland, but the Minister can deal with that when making his comments.

Clubs that are registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs as a charity or a community amateur sports club can receive mandatory 80% rates relief. However, many do not avail themselves of it, due to the huge obligations that are placed in their way and the lack of capacity that may exist in those clubs. It must be remembered that the clubs or associations that have the capacity and the expertise to fill in the forms and to see the process through are the ones that will benefit. Many of the clubs that we are talking about, in the communities that we represent, simply do not have that expertise. Therefore, it would be prudent of the House to support the amendment and for the Minister to come back at a future date —

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Humphrey: I am just coming to the end. It would be wise to allow the Minister, having listened to the debate, to come back at a future date with suggestions that may be of benefit to amateur clubs in Northern Ireland. We must remember that they are amateur clubs, and the capacity does not always exist.

Mr Cree: I was interested in Mr Humphrey's history of the issue. For the record, I will also cover that history, with slight variations.

Rates relief for sports and physical recreation facilities was granted under article 31 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. Since 2002, sports clubs that do not wish to register as charities can receive rates relief under that order if they register as community amateur sports clubs. Initially, such registered clubs here were granted a maximum of 65% rates relief. That changed with the introduction of the Rates (Capital Values, etc.) (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which increased that level to 80%. However, the situation of clubs in the rest of the UK is different. For clubs in England and Wales, section 64 of the Local Government Act 2003 provides 80% mandatory rates relief, and it enables local authorities to provide an additional discretionary 20% rates relief. In Northern Ireland, proposals to increase the level of discretionary rates relief were postponed and were to be considered as part of the review of public administration. However, as you will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, unfortunately that process stalled, and clubs lost out on the benefits that could have accrued from that relief.

The current rates revenue collected from clubs classed as sport and recreation organisations is £1.4 million. That is 0.14% of the total rates collected. Compared with the overall amount collected, that does not appear to be a lot, but it

represents many hours of quizzes, ballots, car boot sales and sponsored activities by clubs across Northern Ireland of every sporting type. It represents a loss of opportunities to buy new equipment, provide coaching standards and develop new facilities. Mr Weir referred to form filling. However, the time spent on those fund-raising activities exceeds by far any time that is likely to be spent on form filling.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I agree entirely with what he said about the time and effort that have to go into fundraising. However, not only time is required to fill in those forms, but expertise, which many amateur clubs will simply not have.

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for that intervention, and he is right. Although not a member of a sporting club, I help people to fill in forms, and I am sure that he is happy to do the same in North Belfast.

In 2009, research carried out on behalf of the Sport and Recreation Alliance reported that the average Northern Ireland sports club had experienced a reduced annual income of £4,179, while the average income of a UK club increased. In the same survey, 23% of Northern Ireland clubs reported a financial deficit for the year 2008-09, and 11% more had experienced deficits in the previous financial year. I refer Members to the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) report of 2009. According to that study, clubs in Northern Ireland are 6% more likely than the UK average to own their facilities, making rates and other associated overheads increasingly important and detrimental to the sustainability and development of such clubs.

The additional savings to sports clubs that 100% rate relief would bring can be demonstrated by taking the Belfast Indoor Bowls Club as an example. It would retain an additional £1,865 a year — a significant saving for any community sports club. That club is a great example of how sports clubs benefit society at large, and it is particularly important when we consider it in light of sports participation by older members of the public. As it stands, the rates costs are being passed on to members, many of whom currently live on the state pension.

The potential benefits to sports clubs of being able to avail themselves of 100% rates relief are many. Such benefits would enable the further realisation of increased and improved community involvement, health, well-being and athletic development. This is an opportunity to empower local people to develop communities by removing a major financial barrier without making an actual financial investment. In the past, my party expressed concern that the investment in spectator infrastructure over the next few years must be followed by investment in facilities to increase participation. Instead of taking money with one hand, passing it through the systems of government and giving it back bound up in red tape with the other, let us start to think more strategically about how we invest in the future of sports development and leave the resources that we currently take in rates in the community, where they will generate long-term benefits. Mr Hamilton referred to all the likely good causes and to the fact that, obviously, all good causes could not be supported. However, I contend that amateur sport is not just a good cause; it is an essential ingredient of society.

12.15 pm

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome the motion and congratulate the Members who tabled it. I am delighted to speak because, like most Members in the Chamber, I have witnessed at close hand the community benefits that amateur sports clubs bring to their neighbourhood. I take the opportunity to congratulate Burren GFC on reaching the Ulster club final, albeit that it will be against Crossmaglen. However, it is great to see two clubs from the Newry and Mourne area reach that stage.

The calculated cost to implement the change that is proposed will undoubtedly be far outweighed by the cost benefit and savings to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety by having the young and old in our communities living healthier lives. Approximately 100 sporting and recreational activities are listed under prescribed recreation and qualify for rate relief. The activities listed can involve strenuous activity such as hurling, hockey or camogie or a more relaxing activity such as yoga. No matter what the activity, the benefits that it brings to an individual's well-being and quality of life are enormous. Clubs providing those activities and facilities are not just looking after the individual but improving the well-being of the whole community.

During this discussion, we should recognise the contribution of the many volunteers in sports clubs across the North in many activities who have given a lifetime of service to their sport, club and community. Indeed, many of those clubs, rural and urban, such as my local GAA club, are much more than sporting organisations. They are often at the very heart of community life, with facilities made freely available for wakes, funerals, special occasions, senior citizens' activities, school events, youth clubs, indoor bowling and so forth.

The motion calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to raise the rate relief afforded to those clubs from 80% to 100% to ensure parity with equivalent clubs in other parts of the UK. We all recognise that the provision of 100% rate relief in the UK is discretionary and that it is up to a local authority to decide whether it should be awarded. I also note that the Finance Minister has indicated in the past that responsibility for that could be passed to local councils following the introduction of the RPA. Rate relief should be introduced in full and should not be discretionary. If a club or group meets the criteria for rate relief, it should be given that 100%. I would also guard against waiting for the introduction of the RPA and passing the responsibility to local councils. That would be an act of gross folly. Just imagine the lobbying that local councillors would face from various clubs. Why would one club or, indeed, one sport get preference over another? How would it appear if a certain sport qualified for relief in one council district but not in a neighbouring one? The ramifications would be horrendous.

I fully support the motion, but rate relief must be implemented fairly and equally across all sports and districts. The people who will administer the relief are the same people who do so today — those in Land and Property Services (LPS) — and their criteria should be as it is today: if a club qualifies for 80% relief, it will receive 100% relief. By supporting the motion today, we are supporting the many sports clubs across the country that are experiencing severe financial challenges and have been put in jeopardy during the economic crisis. We are obligated to support them and

to do all in our power to increase participation in sport and physical activity.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank all the Members who took part in this useful debate. Some Members engaged in acrobatics by supporting both sides of the argument, so there has even been some sporting activity in the House today. Most Members spoke about the benefits of sport, and I have absolutely no doubt that all that they said is correct. As one can see, I do not personally benefit a great deal from sporting activity. However, I know the value of sports clubs and sporting activities in my constituency, as Members said, not just to those who are very able at sports but to those who simply want to dabble or to send their youngsters along. Additional qualities, such as discipline and friendship, are acquired from engaging in sporting activities, and it helps to keep youngsters away from harmful endeavours and so forth. So I do not think that anybody would disagree with the first part of the motion or, indeed, with the preface to almost every Member's speech. That is my first point.

My second point is this: of course the Executive ought to encourage sporting activities for all the reasons that Members gave. The Executive are keen to encourage all sporting activities because of their benefits not only for medical conditions but for education and for addressing antisocial behaviour. It is far better to engage in preventative measures than to deal with a problem once it has arisen. Engaging youngsters and older people in sporting activities can lead to a reduction in pressure on the budgets for health, education, policing etc. Therefore, the Executive already invest considerably in sporting activity.

I do not want to go through all that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does through Sport NI and other activities, nor what is done by the Department for Social Development or the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, I will say that a range of Departments are already engaged in helping to promote sport and sporting activities in Northern Ireland, not just at professional level but at amateur and local level. On top of that, a lot of money comes from local councils. Therefore, it is wrong to give the impression that the only thing that can be done is to give help through the rating system.

Let me outline the help that is already afforded through the rating system. First of all, a wide variety of clubs already qualify for 80% rates relief. On top of that, they can qualify, as many do, for relief on the 20% balance. At present, 170 clubs qualify for small business rates relief. I trust that, when the new proposals come before the Assembly, I will have Members' full support.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a moment or two. Let me just finish the point.

Under the new proposals, another 155 clubs will benefit from small business rates relief. In effect, that will put the relief on rates up to 84%.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for giving way. In my opening remarks, I said that my party could be convinced about the amendment. As the Minister is leading into proposals that he will bring to the House, I will point out that Ulster Unionist Party Members come to the House to listen to measured

arguments and debate; we do not come with our mind already made up. Will the Minister give me his personal commitment that the rates relief will not drop below the 80% level as a result of any future review and that any increase that is applied to that 80% after a review will be automatic and will not require the paperwork and form-filling that has been mentioned?

Mr Wilson: Let me deal with the first point. I can, of course, speak only about the current Programme for Government and the policy that exists over the current four-year budgetary period. There are no plans to change the level of relief under the Programme for Government. Nor, indeed, is there any assumption in the Budget provision for the next four years that there will be a lowering of the rate of relief in order to earn additional revenue. I do not expect that the Member anticipates that I would give a commitment beyond that because to do so would be foolish. If he were any kind of inquisitor at all, his next intervention would be to ask me how I can prophesy what will happen during the next four years. The simple answer is that I cannot. I give the commitment that he has asked for in that regard.

Considerable help is already given through the rates system. Do not forget that the regional rate has been frozen for the past four years and will be for the next four years. That, in turn, will reduce the amount of additional money that clubs would have had to pay had we gone for an increase in rates over that period.

A number of Members suggested that the change would not mean very much — an increase of just £1 million or, probably, £6 million, if bar and restaurant facilities were included — and that, surely, that money could be found. Some Members, of course, simply skirted around that question. Others made suggestions on how the money could be raised, although I will not say whether they were helpful or useful. I accept that, if there were a compelling argument for the motion before us, it would not be an insurmountable task to find that amount of money. However, we would then have to explain to other people who are looking for relief why we have put sporting clubs above, for example, small shopkeepers who are finding themselves under huge pressure during the current recession or above other activities that would plead a special case. So it is not just a question of "Why not give it to clubs?"; you then have to say why you have given that activity priority over some other activity.

A number of people mentioned form filling and so on. As I see it, the real crux of the motion is that Members really ought to be aware of the implications of what is proposed. The current system in Northern Ireland is very simple: if you qualify as a sporting club because you are amateur or a charity, you will qualify automatically for the 80% relief. In GB, not every club gets 100% relief. There are considerable conditions attached, and the more you look at the complex position in GB, the more you could find that, if we were to go down the route that has been suggested in the motion, it could disadvantage a large number of clubs.

A number of Members have explained the position pre-2004, when clubs that were in operation qualified for a discretionary 80% relief, and local authorities could then decide to top that up for worthy clubs. Since 2004, the conditions have been that a club must be registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs as a community amateur sports club; must be a registered charity and a

community amateur sports club; and must bring benefits to the community. Membership must be open to the whole community with no discrimination against those who wish to use the facilities, and fees cannot be set at levels that exclude the local community. The clubs must be organised on an entirely amateur basis, and their main purpose must be to provide facilities for and promote participation in one or more eligible sports that are recognised by sports councils. That would exclude an awful lot of clubs that experience rates relief here, and there will be obligations in running the sports clubs.

All of that has resulted in two things. First, it is estimated that, since 2004, only between 10% and 15% of clubs have registered. So, immediately, by moving away from our automatic system to a system that attaches all those conditions, you create a barrier, which may well be down to the fact that clubs do not wish to have that level of interference in how they are run or, as Mr Cree and others said, do not want anything that immediately means that an awful lot more information is required, more forms need filled in and bureaucracy is increased. The clubs that qualify for the additional 20% — local authorities make that decision — have to be deemed worthy. How do you qualify as a worthy club? The local authority will probably set criteria, and clubs will have to show how they meet them. Once again, you get into the issue of the additional burden on clubs to prove that they qualify under those conditions.

It may well be that, in light of a review, people think that it is better to filter out clubs like that and have a system that puts the onus on clubs to prove that they meet all those conditions. However, I suspect that many small clubs and, indeed, even some larger ones may decide that, because of the degree of interference involved, they do not want to go down that route. Let us learn from the GB experience. Where we have wide coverage of 80% relief in Northern Ireland, you might find that you have a much more limited coverage of 80% relief and, on top of that, you have the 20% discretionary top-up that can be exercised by local authorities.

If it is done by local authorities, it creates a problem. We have a dual system of rates here: the regional rate and the district rate. Should the district authority set the criteria for the district part of the rate? Local authorities might set different criteria. What would that mean for the regional rate? Should we have the same criteria or varying criteria, or do we exempt the regional rate from the 20% part? Those are the kinds of complex issue that need to be dealt with if we are going to make a decision on the matter. Some Members have suggested that it should be taken away from local authorities and should be done by LPS. Again, whether it is done by two bodies or one body, you still have the issue of how you set the criteria, how clubs qualify and what the implications of that are for the clubs. Will you find that clubs simply walk away and say that they do not want to be part of the scheme at all?

I am not averse to looking at the scheme. Any review, I suspect, will be undertaken not by my Department but by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. A case has been made, and I want to outline today — I hope that I have — that the issue is not as simple as it might appear. It would not automatically mean that every club would have 100% relief. It might mean that many clubs that currently qualify would not qualify or would not seek to qualify in the future,

and, in fact, we might find that we have a consequence that we never intended to have in the first place.

I have given an assurance that, at least over the period of this Programme for Government and this Budget, my opposition to the Member's motion is not the first step towards removing or reducing the relief. It is genuinely a much more complex issue than he has suggested. Bearing in mind that assurance and all the points that I have made, I ask Members to oppose the motion and support the amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business after lunch will be Question Time. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

Further Education: Community Groups

1. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any plans he has to engage with local community groups to develop new courses to be delivered at further education facilities. (AQO 808/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I fully support the continued efforts of further education colleges, as the main providers of education in communities throughout Northern Ireland, to encourage people to access their provision. All six colleges deliver a wide and varied curriculum, tailored to meet local needs, through their main campuses and network of community outreach centres strategically placed throughout Northern Ireland.

My Department recently made a significant investment in a range of new cutting-edge college campuses in a number of areas. Colleges will continue to engage with local community groups to ensure that those facilities and services are utilised fully and that the learning demands of communities are met locally.

In recognition of the valuable role that voluntary and community groups can play, the Department developed the learner access and engagement pilot programme, which allows further education colleges to contract with voluntary and community groups for the provision of learner support. The Department commissioned a longitudinal evaluation of the pilot and a recent interim report indicates that the learner access and engagement pilot programme has resulted in new and more effective partnerships between colleges and non-statutory organisations. The final evaluation report, which is due in December 2011, will help to inform future policy decisions post-March 2012, when the pilot ends.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer. I find very encouraging what is under way. Does every college have a dedicated outreach officer in touch with community groups and are they developing ideas with primary and post-primary schools along the lines that we would expect, namely, in collaboration between his Department and the Department of Education?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McNarry for his supplementary question and, indeed, his interest in the issue. I certainly hope and assume that each college has such an outreach officer. With regard to the wider issue, I take very seriously opportunities for collaboration with the Department of Education, schools and further education (FE) colleges. We have the entitlement framework, which addresses some of the specific issues around access to courses. The two Departments are working on finalising a 14 to 19 framework, which will,

hopefully, move beyond the confines of the entitlement framework.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. In light of serious concern in rural communities, not least at the consequences of the recession, particularly for the construction industry, what new courses are delivered at FE colleges that may help unemployed people with construction skills to make themselves more employable in other potential areas of economic growth?

Dr Farry: It is important to emphasise that we recognise that there is a large rural dimension to Northern Ireland, and the scope of community engagement is significant. I think we have 600 community outreach centres across Northern Ireland, so that, hopefully, takes on board that issue.

With regard to construction, a whole range of further education opportunities are available. One of the strengths of our further education sector is that it extends across almost the full spectrum of the skills agenda in Northern Ireland. We have a lot of people with construction skills. For that reason, it is not a priority skill area because we already have the capacity within Northern Ireland. It is important that we stimulate demand for those with the skills. Equally, however, those who wish to train in other skills need to be encouraged, and there are plenty of opportunities for people to look at different courses if they want to try something different.

Mr Dallat: I am sure the Minister will join me in acknowledging the transformation in many people's lives brought about by the collaboration between community groups and further education colleges. Does the Minister agree that there should be a review of that delivery to ensure that there is consistency across all colleges?

Dr Farry: It is important to bear in mind that our FE colleges are autonomous and they will wish to shape their own curriculum provision to suit their own areas, although, of course, there are expectations of a certain commonality across Northern Ireland. We have the learner access and engagement pilot programme, which is being evaluated and which, hopefully, will address some of those issues.

It is also important to reflect on some of the things that Mr Dallat talked about, such as the type of engagement and the creativity that is out there. We have, for example, partnerships with the community on mental health issues, English lessons for speakers of other languages and support for Traveller groups. So, there is a lot of creativity in the type of engagement that exists with the community.

Mr Agnew: What work is being done to make enrolment for FE courses flexible? I am thinking particularly about people who have come out of the justice system midterm or who are just after a pregnancy and looking to get into a course midterm. Is work being done to ensure more flexible enrolment?

Dr Farry: Again, that points to the real flexibility that the FE sector offers. It is there to meet the needs of a very diverse range of customers.

There are some particular areas in which we could always look for improvement. I am particularly interested in following through with the justice issue, because it is important that we focus on the rehabilitation of offenders.

Virtually everyone who goes to prison will, at some stage, come out, and it is important that they are integrated back into society. If the chances of reoffending are reduced, community safety will obviously be enhanced.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I should have announced that questions 9 and 12 have been withdrawn and will require written answers. Question 11 has been transferred to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for written answer.

Higher Education: Equality and Employment Legislation

2. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether all universities and higher education facilities, including teacher training colleges, are complying with current equality and employment legislation. (AQO 809/11-15)

Dr Farry: Yes, there is a legal obligation to do so. Higher education institutions, including the teacher training colleges, must comply with all legislation relating to equality and employment, including section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Furthermore, the financial memoranda between my Department and the higher education institutions stipulate that they give:

“due regard for all legislative requirements placed upon them”.

In addition, the institutions provide an assurance statement to the Department twice a year stating that they are complying with all relevant legislation.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his reply. Minister, quite recently you provided me with a policy statement as adopted on 22 October 1998 by St Mary's University College. Can you explain why, on 22 September 2011, some 13 years later, the Protestant workforce at the college comprises only 7% of the total workforce? How do you plan to deal with that inequality? Do you accept that equality not only needs to be done but needs to be seen to be done?

Dr Farry: I thank Lord Morrow for that supplementary question. I recognise that St Mary's University College is an equal opportunities employer. At the same time, we have a situation where 8% of its total workforce comes from a Protestant background.

In collaboration with the Equality Commission, the college has a religious affirmative action plan, which is reviewed on a three-yearly basis. The college is also actively promoting the recruitment of Protestant staff on the “Employment Opportunities” section of its website.

I believe that St Mary's is conscious of the need to improve that situation. The balance of the workforce is something that I have concern about. Obviously, it is important to recognise that a whole range of historical and societal factors have led to the situation that we are in today, but that does not mean that there does not have to be change. Change needs to come soon. I want to impress on the House and, indeed, on Lord Morrow that St Mary's is very conscious of that issue and of the need to address it in the very near future. I have certainly made those points to the college.

Mr Eastwood: Given the ongoing and historical problems, will the Minister give us his assessment of the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report into redundancy procedures at the North West Regional College?

Dr Farry: I think that that is a very broad stretch of the subject of the core question. A draft report is in place, and I will hopefully have the chance to review the full report in the near future. I am more than happy to make representations to the board of governors in a very general sense about the need to address concerns about human resources issues at the college. However, it is equally important to stress that the college is autonomous and that it, not my Department, has direct responsibility for those issues.

Mr Allister: The Minister refers to societal pressures and history that might explain the St Mary's situation. Could the same not be said historically of Stranmillis, and yet it has been remarkably successful in attracting a cross-community workforce, in that 30% of its workforce, including its teaching staff, comes from the Catholic community? In contrast, as has been pointed out, St Mary's is stuck in the rut of 8%. Why is that?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Allister for his supplementary. The statistics are as he outlined. It is fair to say that more progress has been made in Stranmillis over time. Of course, it is important that we bear in mind that Stranmillis is a non-denominational institution and has a mixed student enrolment. I reiterate that St Mary's needs to travel on a journey in respect of the balance, but it is committed to travelling along that path. Others have travelled slightly further due to a whole range of issues, including the nature of our society, geography and where institutions may be located. The whole House will want to observe that progress in the years to come.

St Mary's University College, Belfast: PA Consulting Group Report

3. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why his Department did not respond to the PA Consulting Group report on the future sustainability of St Mary's University College, Belfast. (AQO 810/11-15)

Dr Farry: A copy of 'A Report on the Way Forward', which was produced by PA Consulting, was sent to my Department in December 2010, and the permanent secretary responded to it in February 2011. In essence, the response was an acknowledgement that the Department had received a copy of the report. At that time, it was not appropriate for the Department to comment on the report as its recommendations had not been agreed or accepted by the college's governing body.

It is my understanding that the report informed the production of a draft college institutional plan, which was agreed by the governing body in June 2011. Since then, I have had several meetings and discussions with members of the governing body and senior staff of the college, which have proved very informative.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his response. On page 73 of the PA Consulting report, recommendation 2 states that there should be a small-scale expansion of liberal arts student

numbers at St Mary's University College. Can the Minister tell us his Department's attitude to that recommendation?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Sheehan for his supplementary. I hope to make a statement on teacher training issues to the House in the very near future. For now, it is worth saying that I do not have any immediate plans to increase the number of liberal arts places at St Mary's. It is important that the House understand the context of those places. St Mary's is a university college that is, essentially, based around teacher training; liberal arts are an expansion beyond its core area of business. There could be an argument that such courses should be consolidated elsewhere in the university system, so we have to take great care in how we approach the issue.

It is also important to bear in mind that the provision of liberal arts places in St Mary's goes a considerable way towards aiding the college's finances. In effect, liberal arts act as a significant subsidy to keep the college viable when it would not be otherwise. Those are all issues that the House needs to reflect on. As Minister, I am certainly reflecting on them.

Mr Storey: Minister, you made reference earlier to the fact that St Mary's was on a journey. What evidence have you based that on? There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that it has even commenced the journey —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that we are on the next question; we are discussing the report.

Mr Storey: Yes. I will come to that, Deputy Speaker. In relation to —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It is a question, not —

Mr Storey: Will the report include an explanation as to why St Mary's will not allow students from Stranmillis to do the Catholic certificate at St Mary's? That forces our students to go and have it paid for in Glasgow. Surely that is not the indication of a university on a journey.

2.15 pm

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Storey for his supplementary question. Clearly, St Mary's is a major focus of attention here today. I have had some very frank meetings with St Mary's where my officials and I raised a range of issues, of both a financial nature and relating to equality of opportunity. St Mary's has engaged in a constructive and creative way and is alert to a number of the issues and concerns raised by Members and in the wider community.

I am minded of the differential access to the Catholic certificate between students that attend St Mary's and those who attend Stranmillis, and I hope to say more about that next week. St Mary's has engaged with me on that issue.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister accept the report's premise that enrolment is key to sustainability, and, if so, what is the actual hard number that represents the minimum enrolment to secure the future sustainability of St Mary's?

Dr Farry: Enrolment figures are critical to the sustainability of any institution. It is important that it is clear to the House that the initial teacher training numbers are set by the Department of Education but that my Department funds those allocated places. Beyond that, my Department pays a

premium on top of the initial funds for each teacher training place, and that also goes to the viability of the colleges. There is also the support of the liberal arts grants at St Mary's and other forms of support that go to Stranmillis, so the teacher training institutions attract a wide-ranging funding package. We need to ask ourselves whether we are best using the financial resources at our disposal in what is a difficult financial context for us all and bearing in mind the other pressing demand-led pressures within the Department.

Ms Lo: The bottom line is that we have far too many teacher training institutions. Does the Minister intend to carry out a review on the sustainability of the sector?

Dr Farry: I thank my colleague for that question. I have seized upon teacher training issues at the moment: there is the Stranmillis/Queen's merger, but there are also issues around the system as a whole. It is fair to say that my starting point is to ensure that we have a world-class teacher training system in Northern Ireland. We owe nothing less to the future schoolchildren of Northern Ireland as well as the future teachers of this society. It is important that the institutions are there to reflect the demands and needs of society rather than the other way round. We have to consider a range of issues, and I hope to return to the House over the next week or two to make a full statement on these issues.

Apprenticeships: North Belfast

4. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students are enrolled on apprenticeship programmes at further education colleges in the North Belfast constituency. (AQO 811/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Newtownabbey campus of the Northern Regional College is the only further education college located in the North Belfast parliamentary constituency, and 90 apprentices are based there. In addition, 826 apprentices with addresses in the North Belfast parliamentary constituency avail themselves of apprenticeship training through a range of training organisations including private training providers, those in the community and voluntary sector, the Newtownabbey campus of the Northern Regional College, and other colleges.

Furthermore, because of the economic downturn, the Department established provision for the programme-led apprentices as a short-term measure. That programme provides training at level 2 based on the respective apprenticeship frameworks to unemployed young people who are unable to secure employment to follow an apprenticeship under ApprenticeshipsNI. There are currently 463 programme-led apprenticeships in the North Belfast constituency.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is his assessment of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in equipping these people for further employment in the workplace?

Dr Farry: Apprenticeships Northern Ireland is the core apprenticeship scheme that my Department has. It is very important that we invest in apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. The difficulties with that scheme are that it is demand-led and that we need the buy-in from employers to provide places. It was for that reason that, under a previous

regime in my Department, programme-led apprenticeships were established to reflect the fact that some people were not able to find the employment-based route in order to take forward an apprenticeship. The Member will also be aware that we have managed to ensure the restoration of essentially 50% funding for adult apprenticeships. On the back of that, we have launched a review of adult training to see how we can better target the resources available for adults in order to maximise the benefit for both the individuals and the future needs of the economy.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I understand that there may be some problems with the amplification system. I ask Members to speak clearly into their microphone so that they are picked up right.

Dr McDonnell: How high a priority does the Minister set by investing in and maintaining apprenticeship programmes generally? Let me put it another way: what plans does the Minister have to put us in a position to take advantage of any potential in the future of an upturn in the construction industry?

Dr Farry: I thank Dr McDonnell for his question, and I assure the House that I take apprenticeships incredibly seriously. I would like to be able to pump as much resource into them as possible. Apprenticeships Northern Ireland is, of course, demand-led, so the Department will respond to demand as it changes. Equally, it is important that we recognise that we are in a very difficult financial context right across the Executive, including within my Department. In particular, we are currently wrestling with a very heavy demand for the employment service. That is also about finding means of getting people who are out of work into work and ensuring that we invest in their lives and how they can make a contribution to the economy. Within the means that we have, we will certainly direct as much as we can to the front line in relation to training.

Mr Swann: I think that I am close enough to the microphone. Will the Minister give his assessment of the creative apprenticeship scheme set up in April 2011?

Dr Farry: At this stage, it is something that we will need to take a bit longer to do, rather than doing it after six or seven months. Perhaps Mr Swann will return to the House with that question in a few months' time, and I will give him a more rounded answer.

Incapacity Benefit

5. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department has employed any new advisers for the reassessment of incapacity benefit. (AQO 812/11-15)

Dr Farry: In recognition of the need for reassessment and to make transition as smooth and as painless as possible, my Department's employment service has secured funding for an additional 24 front line staff for the period to 31 March 2012. That is made up of 19 advisers and an additional five staff to provide administrative support. The Department's human resource branch is in the process of filling those posts as demand gradually rises due to the reassessment of incapacity benefit.

As the number of clients engaging with the Department's employment service increases due to the reassessment of incapacity benefit, it is likely that further additional front line staff will be required. I will ensure that the situation is kept under review and future funding is sought as necessary to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to deal with any increases.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. Given the expected migration of so many, possibly thousands of people, from long-term sickness benefit to jobseeker's allowance, will the Minister assure the House that there will be adequate staff with the capacity and training to deal with the range and complexity of learning and mental health problems that will come around?

Dr Farry: We expect around 76,000 individuals to go through the process of reassessment. We estimate that around 7,500 individuals will make the full migration to jobseeker's allowance. In relation to the issue of staff, I will certainly push for additional resources if those are required. I will certainly not shirk in that regard. The Member also made a broader point about mental health issues. That reflects some of the discussion earlier about the Social Security Agency, which does the initial reassessments.

It is important that we are sensitive to the individual needs of all customers coming through our doors. I have impressed that upon the employment service and upon my officials, and they are acutely aware of it. Training is being given to staff to make sure that they pick up on those issues and that they are sensitive to the whole range of people's mental health issues.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his responses. The reassessments of incapacity benefit will have a direct effect on the numbers looking for employment. Will the Minister detail the consequences of not being awarded his full bids in the October monitoring round for the Steps to Work programme? What effect does he believe that will have on the delivery of its goals?

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Overend for her question. There is considerable pressure on the employment service, and it is important that the whole House be aware of that. Unfortunately, we had to freeze recruitment on the Step Ahead programme, which is the most expensive of our offerings. It was necessary because resources were tight and so that we could focus on other aspects of Steps to Work and maximise the numbers that we can process. We are still in difficulties in ensuring that we can live within budget, given demand this year. We are looking carefully at how we manage budgets internally, and I will have no hesitation in making future monitoring round bids to meet any shortfall.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answers until now. The Minister said that he is happy with the level of training given to those who carry out the focused interviews. That is OK, but some people suffer from mental illnesses such as paranoia, autism or bipolar disease, among others. Is the Minister confident that if such people become distressed during interviews, those conducting the interview can look after them and deal with any such situation?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCann for his supplementary question. People will be trained to anticipate and respond to the type of scenarios that he points out. This is about

treating everyone who comes through the door as an individual, not just a number or statistic. Each is an individual with his own hopes, aspirations and the capacity to make a contribution to society. In many cases, they have a very strong willingness to enter into work. Equally, people have a range of barriers that might prevent them from accessing work; therefore it is important, for a whole range of reasons, that our staff are sensitive to them. It is not just about how we manage an interview; it is also about how we address those issues and encourage people to think about entering the workforce.

Regional Colleges: Capital Requirements

6. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the current capital requirements of regional colleges. (AQO 813/11-15)

Dr Farry: Over the past 11 years, there has been significant capital expenditure in further education; however, the six colleges still have a range of estate requirements. Bids for those have been made in the investment strategy for Northern Ireland No 3. The projects are at various stages of development; some have business cases prepared while others are continuing to work on their business cases.

The estate needs are as follows: for the Northern Regional College, there are the Ballymoney, Coleraine and Ballymena campuses, and there has been little significant investment in the estates of that college; for the Southern Regional College, there are the Portadown, Lurgan, Banbridge and Armagh campuses; for the South West College — which will be of most interest to Mr Lynch — there is the Fairview campus in Enniskillen. That college has submitted a business case that has been assessed by the Department. There are a number of issues to be resolved by the college, but those should be dealt with in the near future. For the North West Regional College, there are the Strabane, Tower, Courtyard and Springtown campuses; the college also wishes to develop a new campus at Clondermot in the Waterside. For the South Eastern Regional College there is a new Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre in Bangor. For the Belfast Metropolitan College, a new campus at Springvale is being built. There is also a need to address deficiencies at the Castlereagh campus, which wishes to develop a sports and drama facility.

Capital funding for the further education colleges over the next three years totals £26.3 million, of which £18 million is contractually committed; some £8 million remains unallocated. It will be used for minor works, and all colleges will be invited to bid for an allocation.

2.30 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

1. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the number of jobs created by Invest NI in small and medium-sized enterprises in 2010-11 was the lowest in the last five years. (AQO 823/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In the past financial year, Invest NI offered assistance of over £29 million to 2,820 small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) projects. That resulted in the promotion of 1,500 new jobs, a slight drop from the previous year, when 1,700 new jobs were promoted. A number of factors contributed to that downward trend, including increased difficulty for businesses in securing bank funding and companies delaying their expansion plans as a means of minimising the impact of the economic downturn on their core business.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for the response. However, figures prove that SMEs do not get support from the Department proportionate to the role that they play in the economy. Will the Minister agree to review the investment made in SMEs and foreign investment, with a view to ensuring that SMEs get support from Invest NI proportionate to their role in the economy?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, because it gives me an opportunity to say that, in the previous Programme for Government period, 59% of all Invest NI support — or £254.8 million — was offered to locally owned businesses. There is a perception that the majority of Invest Northern Ireland's investment is foreign direct investment, but that is not true. I have to say that that perception is aided by some Members who keep on saying it. I really wish that Members would look at the figures: nearly 60% of all of Invest Northern Ireland's support in the previous Programme for Government period went to small and medium-sized businesses.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister just referred to the previous Programme for Government. The Programme for Government announced last week refers to the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs. Will the Minister assure the House that she is committed to ensuring that small to medium-sized enterprises are a focus for her and that the target audience will be new business start-ups?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. If we look at the breakdown of the 25,000 jobs announced in the Programme for Government and detailed in the economic strategy, we see that 5,900 are to come from foreign direct investment; 6,300 from expansions by locally owned companies, which relates to our ongoing work with the Boosting Business programme that, as the Member is aware, has been rolled out right across Northern Ireland; 6,500 as a result of new business starts; and 6,300 as a result of the jobs fund. The jobs fund is going very well, and there will be more announcements on it in the very near future.

Mr Swann: Why, six months after the launch of a short-term employment scheme with a £19 million budget, have so few, if any, small and medium-sized enterprises grasped the opportunity to employ additional staff?

Mrs Foster: Again, that is not true. Only one large company, Capita pensions in north Belfast, took advantage of the jobs fund. To date, any other companies that availed themselves of the jobs fund were small companies. Around 13 jobs were created at a couple of companies in Londonderry. Creative Composites in Lisburn is an SME and created 30 new jobs in Lagan valley. To date, we have promoted 400 jobs through the jobs fund. As I said in the Chamber last week, 1,300

jobs have been approved, and there will be announcements on those in the very near future.

Mr McGlone: Will the Minister please give us some detail of the loan fund suggested in the Programme for Government, particularly with regard to small and medium-sized enterprises? What are the criteria for that loan fund, and where will those be announced?

Mrs Foster: We have approvals in place for the £50 million growth loan fund. The loans will be targeted at viable SMEs in the manufacturing and tradable services sector that need additional funding to realise their growth potential. Essentially, we want to assist firms that are trying to grow but cannot get the funding to do so because of the banking crisis. We identified that gap, of which the Member is well aware. We had to find an innovative way in which to close the gap. In the very near future, we plan to begin a procurement process to appoint a Financial Services Authority (FSA)-approved fund manager to manage the fund. Loans will typically be between £50,000 and £500,000, so we are not talking about huge sums of money, but it is money that cannot be had elsewhere.

Small businesses across Northern Ireland tell me that they are having severe difficulties in accessing funding. That is why I found it rather strange to hear a representative from one of the banks on 'Stormont Today' last night saying that we needed more enterprise in Northern Ireland. That is absolutely right. We do need more enterprise in Northern Ireland, but it would be lovely if the banks stepped up to the mark and helped those small and medium-sized businesses to invest in their companies and to grow. However, Invest Northern Ireland has had to come forward with a growth loan fund. A few technicalities need to be sorted out, and, once that happens, we will make a fuller statement. I know that people are waiting for that.

Economy: Euro Zone

2. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that the economic uncertainty in the euro zone is likely to have on our economy. (AQO 824/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Uncertainty across the euro zone is dampening economic growth around the world. We are not immune from those impacts, as we have strong trade links with the euro zone. With only modest growth projected across the euro area, our exports, for example, are likely to be affected by muted domestic demand for our goods and services in the euro zone.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. What measures could the Minister or her Department put in place to support local businesses exporting to euro zone countries against the backdrop of the current economic crisis?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. He is right to be concerned about that issue because 49% of our manufacturing exports are to the euro zone, 29% of which go to the Republic of Ireland, and 21% go to the rest of Europe. That is why the economic strategy refers to a deepening of our export base. The strategy also mentions the diversification of our export base, and it is hugely important that we look to new markets outside the euro zone. Therefore, as the Member will know — he

has probably heard me speak about this before — Invest Northern Ireland is taking a trade delegation to Brazil in the very near future. We also want to look at Russia, India and China. He will also know that I returned from Kurdistan only a couple of weeks ago.

It is about looking for new markets as well as supporting companies in their current markets. That is why I welcome last week's PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which highlighted the fact that the best potential way to grow our economy is to raise the share of our exports focused on developing economies outside the euro area. We have taken that on in our economic strategy.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister given any consideration to providing InterTradeIreland with additional support to get cross-border trade back into a position of growth?

Mrs Foster: It would be more useful for me to concentrate on deepening and diversifying our export base than looking to a base with which we already do a lot of business. As I said, our exports are at almost 30%. It is fine if firms want to look to the Republic of Ireland for their first export experience, but, from a sustainability point of view, we really need to encourage them to look wider into the global village so that we do not have huge export activity in the euro zone and then have to deal with the consequences.

Mr Givan: With the uncertainty in the euro zone, would the Minister be concerned if the instability continued and some countries ended up having to withdraw from using the euro? What impact would that have, particularly on the financial markets and the banks in the United Kingdom and their current levels of lending to the domestic market?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question, but it could probably be more expertly answered by my colleague the Minister of Finance. However, if the euro were to break up, there would be wide implications for Northern Ireland, including a major impact on the banking sector. If we think of the countries that have given sovereign loans to Greece, Italy and Spain, we can see that the implications for the rest of us are absolutely huge. It may lead to a run on banks in weaker European countries, causing wider liquidity problems for us in Northern Ireland. My goodness, have we not enough liquidity problems as it sits? Be under no illusion: what happens in the euro zone will have an impact on us in Northern Ireland. That is why we very much need to keep an eye on what is happening, keep in contact with Her Majesty's Treasury and take advice in relation to how the United Kingdom economy goes forward.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister agree that the euro zone is not the only threat to our economy from Europe? What specific action is the Minister taking to argue against the potential loss of cohesion funds from 2014, as Northern Ireland is currently classed as a more developed region for 2014-2020?

Mrs Foster: I understand that my colleague the junior Minister was at a Joint Ministerial Committee meeting on Europe yesterday and cohesion funding was raised. The Member is right to say that the euro zone and the financial difficulties there are not the only difficulties that we face from Europe: a lot of funding for various schemes comes from Europe. Obviously, I am concerned about the debate that is going on about the selective financial assistance

regional aid or, in other words, the cutting down of the 100% availability of that to Northern Ireland and the consultation that has just finished in relation to it. I also continue to be concerned about the number of regulations that come to us from Europe via Whitehall and the impact that they have on our small businesses. The cumulative effect of all of that is that Europe has a disproportionate impact on Northern Ireland. Therefore, we need to be proactive in Brussels to make sure that we argue our case forcefully.

Credit Unions

3. Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how she has addressed the concerns of credit unions, following the publication of the HM Treasury and the Financial Services Authority joint consultation paper 'FSA regulation of credit unions in Northern Ireland'. (AQO 825/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In 2009, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's report on the role and potential of credit unions in Northern Ireland recommended that regulatory responsibility for credit unions in Northern Ireland should be transferred to the Financial Services Authority. The FSA and Treasury joint consultation on the transfer of the regulatory function closed at the end of October 2011. I share some of the concerns raised by the sector as part of that process and have written to the Treasury Minister responsible, asking that a number of the proposed changes to the regulatory regime be reconsidered.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Minister assure the House that she will do what she can to make sure that credit unions in Northern Ireland continue to receive what they have described in their submission as "peace of mind" through their interaction with her Department?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The relationship between the credit unions and officials in my Department has been very good. They have a close relationship, and they have worked well over the past number of years. However, as the Member will realise, regulation by the FSA was to enable credit union members, with the additional consumer protection of the FSA scheme, to get access to the Financial Ombudsman Service and to create the ability to offer a wider range of services to the people who use the credit unions. Those issues were the genesis of the very good work that was carried out by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

We want to see the credit unions grow in Northern Ireland. They are a vital part of our financial capability here in the Province. That is why I have written to Mark Hoban, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and pointed out some of the difficulties with the scheme as it sits. I hope that he will take on board those factors. The credit union regime in Great Britain is completely different to the credit union societies in Northern Ireland. They are much more prevalent here and do a lot of very good work, and I very much hope that he takes on board what I have said, what I know the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has said and what I know very many credit unions throughout the country want us to say.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's response and the fact that she has written to the FSA, but I do not think that

that peace of mind will be available, given that the FSA is regulating. I have spoken to directors of credit unions, and they are very concerned about the accountability structures that they will be under. Is there any way we can have a regional variation on the rules here, given the importance of our credit union sector and the fact that many people involved in the credit union movement work voluntarily?

2.45 pm

Mrs Foster: I recognise what the Member says. This whole debate originated when credit unions, of which there are many in our constituency, wanted more powers to be able to interact more meaningfully with their communities and deal with issues like child trust funds, which they were not able to do under the existing regime. That is why it was felt that they needed to be FSA-regulated. However, I recognise some of the problems that have arisen, particularly in relation to the capacity of some of our credit unions. Some of them work in a very small but very meaningful way, and it is about how we as a Department can help them with capacity building. I have asked Mark Hoban to look at that issue. I have also asked him to look at a reduction in the maximum deposit limit, the proposed limits on the investment maturity period and the proposals to limit credit union borrowing. All those things need to be looked at again, and I hope that he takes the opportunity to do that.

Mr Dunne: Following on from the previous answer, can the Minister advise what help the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) can give to small credit unions to ensure that they are able to cope with the additional bureaucracy and regulation? Does she acknowledge the role that credit unions play in community building?

Mrs Foster: I have absolutely no problem in acknowledging the role of credit unions throughout the years in many communities across Northern Ireland. As well as writing to the Minister concerned at the Treasury, I have spoken to the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Hugo Swire, and raised with him our concerns about the difficulties that we face. It is really a balancing act. We want to be able to offer more services, but we recognise that there may be capability issues with some credit unions. They may find the burden of being regulated by the FSA onerous. It is about trying to close that gap, and my officials in DETI and I will work proactively to see how we can close that gap. However, we have to work with Treasury officials as well on this matter.

Titanic Centenary

4. Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on preparations for the 2012 Titanic centenary celebrations. (AQO 826/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Next year will be a momentous one for Northern Ireland, with a series of significant dates, commemorations and anniversaries. The key anniversary will be the centenary of the maiden voyage of Titanic in April 2012, and we will of course see the opening of the new £97 million Titanic Belfast visitor experience, which itself is a significant marker of the centenary. This will be an opportunity to clearly identify Belfast and Northern Ireland as the home of Titanic.

I recently launched NI 2012: Our Time, Our Place, which is an exciting year-long programme of major international

and national events. This includes significant recognition of the Titanic centenary, both celebrating the shipbuilding achievement and commemorating the maiden voyage and the lives lost. The programme will provide a real platform to change perceptions of Northern Ireland on a world stage and provide significant economic benefits.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for her reply. However, given that 2012 will mark the loss of life associated with the sinking of the Titanic, I have to ask why the major celebration was not the launch of the ship, the anniversary of which was last year.

Mrs Foster: As I have always said to the House, this is about celebrating what is going on in Belfast in 2012 but also commemorating the lives that were lost on the Titanic. I am sorry that the Member has not seen the plans. If he had been at the all-party working group on tourism on Monday morning, he would have seen the plans for not only celebrating but commemorating. It is about that balance. We want to celebrate what happened in the past, and we want to look to the future for Northern Ireland and recognise the great work that happened at that time. Do not forget, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, that she was all right when she left Belfast.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will be aware that the Titanic ported not only in Belfast but in Cobh, County Cork. Will she explore what work can be done with Cork County Council and the Dublin Government to ensure that the product in Belfast is signposted in Cork? What work of mutual benefit can be done in both areas?

Mrs Foster: As you know, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is responsible not just for Northern Ireland but for marketing in the Republic of Ireland, and it has been working through its office in Dublin to see how we can sell the story of the Titanic in the Republic of Ireland. There is a lot of work going on there, and I am happy to share it with him in correspondence. I do not have the details here, but I know that the Tourist Board has been doing a lot of work through its Dublin office.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Minister agree that there is substantial potential for a successful marina development in the Titanic Quarter in Belfast that could go alongside the various Titanic celebrations?

Mrs Foster: A huge programme of work is going on in the Titanic Quarter, as the Member is aware. I am not sure whether he is talking about something specific that he is aware of. Certainly, there are great plans to develop the Titanic Quarter, and we will see those in the work on the signature project, the building offices and the slipways, as well as in work on the rest of the harbour. It is my hope that, when people go to the Titanic signature project, it will be seen as a real destination to visit. As well as that — I take up the point made in the previous question — there is a need to signpost visitors to all the other attractions around the Province, so that people do not just come to Belfast but go out and around Northern Ireland and take in all that we have to offer. There will be a lot going on next year.

Ms P Bradley: I was one of those who attended the launch of the all-party group on tourism on Monday morning, and I heard, at first hand, from the Tourist Board and the Minister about the exciting plans for next year. How will the

celebrations affect not only the greater Belfast area but Northern Ireland as a whole?

Mrs Foster: The Member wants to know how I am going to help Dervock; I will have to come back to that.

There is a programme of major events. There will be around seven tier 1 events, as we are calling them, and those will be international events. However, there are also tier 2 events, which will go across the Province. It is my hope that other new or existing events will come forward to fit into the 2012 themes of the giants of Northern Ireland, which is a very wide theme that can cover a lot of issues, or Titanic Belfast and maritime heritage, which covers our coastline. So, this is a Northern Ireland gig; it is not just a Belfast gig. I very much want everybody across Northern Ireland, from Enniskillen to Belfast, to get involved to make sure that we get the most out of it.

Invest NI: Job Creation

5. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, of the jobs promoted by Invest NI in the last five years, how many jobs have been created and how many are still in existence. (AQO 827/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland does not presently measure job creation. However, in line with the independent review of economic policy (IREP) recommendation, I have asked that there be a greater focus on project outcomes, and new systems are now being developed. Once they are in place, it is intended that Invest Northern Ireland will be able to provide a half-yearly update on the number of jobs created as a result of any offers made since April 2008. Following the completion of a full data collection exercise, it is expected that Invest NI will be in a position to present the final analysis of job creation by spring 2012.

Invest Northern Ireland currently has some 1,500 employment-related letters of offer in process, each of which has its own implementation plan, job creation profile, delivery date and control period. Provision of precise point-in-time job creation data is complex and open to misinterpretation without an in-depth understanding of the job creation profile of each of the individual projects that were supported during the period in question.

Mr Allister: I think that many people will be amazed that the Minister does not know how many of the jobs that Invest NI says it promoted over the past five years it in fact saw created and how many still exist. Surely that knowledge is essential to measure promises of future job creation and to see how the people who are making the promises actually performed in the past. It might be welcome that they are now beginning to put in motion measures that may answer those questions, but why have we lived through a system in which we do not know how many jobs were actually created? We certainly know how many were lost, but is it not time that the Minister knew how many were created?

Mrs Foster: It is disappointing that the Member does not recognise that the matter is being dealt with. The IREP report made proposals on all those issues, and 95% of them have been implemented. This one is in the process of being implemented and will be in place by spring 2012. Of course, the Member cannot acknowledge when progress is going on. He just cannot acknowledge that we are

dealing with the issue. Instead, he reverts to what I read of his Radio Ulster piece of work, in which he said that we were interested only in foreign direct investment. We are not interested only in foreign direct jobs. I have already detailed the number of jobs coming from our companies, from business start-ups and from the jobs fund. Yet again, however, the Member cannot acknowledge that that is the case and seeks to mislead the Assembly on the 25,000 jobs. The matter is being dealt with, and it would be nice if he could acknowledge that.

Mr D McIlveen: I will come back into a slightly more optimistic world. Will the Minister outline how much investment has gone into North Antrim recently as a result of Invest NI? Does she agree that the Member for North Antrim might have been a bit better informed had he stayed in the Chamber and listened to details of the economic strategy as those were being put forward last week?

Mrs Foster: The Member for North Antrim was down to speak on the economic strategy, so it was disappointing that he left the Chamber and did not take the opportunity to raise a question with me on that occasion. However, I am happy to say that, if the Member had been here, he would have heard me refer specifically to the tremendous work by Wrightbus in Ballymena on the London bus and to the research and development being done there. As well as that, in the hotel industry, the Adair Arms Hotel is investing £1.6 million, and I understand that the Galgorm Resort and Spa is investing in new jobs. Those are just three examples of what is going on in North Antrim. There is a lot of activity, and there is more that can be done. Of course, there is always more that we can do. I have asked all Invest NI offices right across Northern Ireland to be more proactive in working with small and medium-sized businesses.

Ms Lo: Very often, public procurement here tends to favour large companies parachuted in from England. How much help can Invest NI give to our home-grown companies to make them more competitive and win the big contracts?

Mrs Foster: The Member is right to raise the issue of procurement as a barrier to small and medium-sized enterprises, and we have been concerned about it. InterTradelreland does some work with companies here. Some of its programmes — for example, Go-2-Tender and Network and Getwork — are, essentially, for small businesses so that they can get into the system and learn how to tender for government contracts. As well as that, the Boosting Business initiative brought forward by Invest Northern Ireland intends to get alongside those companies and give them any help that they need. Therefore, there will not be an exclusive use of Invest NI's time. Instead, it will look at ways that it can help small companies. I am sure that procurement will be one of the issues that will come up time and time again.

Agrifood

6. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work her Department is undertaking to promote the agrifood sector. (AQO 828/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 10 October 2011, I attended the Northern Ireland pavilion at Anuga, Cologne, and launched a new Northern Ireland red meat export initiative with the English Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board and Quality

Meat Scotland. Twenty-six Northern Ireland companies participated at that international trade event, including three of Northern Ireland's largest red meat processors: Dunbia, Foyle Food Group and Linden Foods.

In these challenging economic times, the Northern Ireland food and drink processing sector continues to be the biggest contributor to the manufacturing sector, with a growth of 8.3% in turnover last year from £3.4 billion in 2009 to £3.7 billion in 2010. To sustain that growth, my Department, through Invest Northern Ireland, continues to promote the Northern Ireland food sector internationally through a comprehensive programme of trade missions, exhibitions and events. In the past two months, 128 food sector companies were promoted outside Northern Ireland at trade events.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for the information that she gave in her answer. I am told that a report on how we can improve the agrifood sector across the island of Ireland has been ready since May 2011 but remains unpublished. Does she share my concern at that?

3.00 pm

Mrs Foster: I am not responsible for the publication of reports, including the agrifood report produced by InterTradelreland, which I think was what the Member referred to. However, if the Member checks online, he may find that that report has been published.

Private Members' Business

Sports Clubs: Rate Relief

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly recognises the benefits which community and amateur sports clubs bring to local communities; notes the vital role which they play in encouraging participation in sporting activities and the contribution they make in promoting healthy lifestyles; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to raise the rate relief afforded to these clubs from 80% to 100% to ensure parity with equivalent clubs in other parts of the UK. — [Mr Swann.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Personnel" and insert

"to examine the rate relief afforded to these clubs." — [Mr Hamilton.]

Mr McQuillan: I rise to wind on the amendment proposed by my colleague Simon Hamilton. I, like many other Members, agree with the sentiment of the motion. However, in the current economic climate it would be hard to defend such a decision, which would ultimately see money being cut from somewhere else to pay for it. After all, sport is an issue for the Assembly and not one for local government. Where would the money come from? Would it come from health, education or roads? I am happy to hear suggestions, but I heard none during the debate.

When the Conservative Party campaigned prior to the 2010 general election, its members shouted about the Labour Government spending more money than the nation was bringing in. That led to a Budget deficit, which became a major focus of the Conservative Party's manifesto, and, it must be said, of the Ulster Unionist Party in the form of the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists New Force (UCUNF). When the Conservatives formed an alliance with the Liberal Democrats in the wake of the general election, which produced a hung Parliament, the Conservative-led Government pushed forward an emergency Budget and a spending review that was published in October 2010. That resulted in our Executive having less money to spend, despite growing pressures on the health service, social housing, education and roads. My party fought against those cuts while others stood on the sidelines, and that was reflected in the endorsement of my party in the May elections.

Community and amateur sports clubs contribute a significant amount to society and to their communities, and I value their contribution to society in Northern Ireland. Such clubs not only provide a function in the promotion of healthy lifestyles, especially by tackling childhood obesity among our young people, but they also help to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. They have also been proven to promote good relations between all sections of society in Northern Ireland, which is the centrepiece of the cohesion, sharing and integration policy for tackling sectarianism and racism. Many of the clubs also act as community hubs and provide a centre for communities. However, many community centres are exempt from paying rates as they not revenue-generating.

Although the Minister of Finance and Personnel would like to assist all worthwhile causes across society, we must take into consideration the financial constraints that the Assembly must operate under. At present, 700 clubs benefit from the 80% rate relief, the cost of which is met by the Department of Finance and Personnel at a total cost of £3.8 million each year. Increasing the relief would result in an additional cost of £1 million each year, and if the relief programme was extended beyond sporting clubs, it would cost an additional £6 million each year. That would only put an additional burden on the Northern Ireland Executive at a time when we need to spend our block grant wisely amid a major worldwide economic crisis.

It is worth stating that the Northern Ireland Executive have, in fact, frozen the regional rate for some years now, and that has gone some way to limiting the burden on community and amateur sports clubs. The amendment does not change the nature of the motion; it simply asks the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine the case for increasing the rate relief that is afforded to such clubs.

I will now move on to summarise some of the points that were made during the debate. Mr Robin Swann proposed the motion and said that he did so after consulting various sports clubs. He went on to say that the Programme for Government makes several commitments to sport but that commitment is lacking at a grass-roots level. Mr Swann also said that he would not support the amendment as it would weaken the motion, but that he might change his mind, depending on what he heard from the DUP Benches.

Mr Simon Hamilton proposed the amendment and he thanked Mr Swann for tabling the motion. He said that no one in the House would argue with the first part of the motion; he went on to commend the volunteers in sporting clubs for giving up their time. He also said that clubs help with obesity and play an important role in society.

In an intervention to Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey said that sports clubs can help kids to turn their lives around, and, in a further intervention, Mr McClarty said that there would be a cost if we did nothing. Mr Hamilton replied that sports clubs already receive 80% relief. He gave a commitment that clubs would continue to receive that level of rate relief and that there was no intention of going back to the previous level of 65%. The Minister reiterated that commitment in his contribution.

Mr Sheehan said that he agreed with the two previous Members; he also said that it was positive for kids to be involved in sport and that it gave them a focus in life. He gave the example of his own amateur sports club, which is finding it very difficult. That point was agreed with by nearly all Members who spoke.

Dominic Bradley said that, through improving health and well-being, implementing 100% rate relief would save £1 million in the long run. He also said that kids learned values from sport that they then applied in other walks of life.

Chris Lyttle said that he is an amateur sports player. He agreed with the amendment and the motion but said that the amendment would make the motion better because it would give the Finance Minister a bit of scope.

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

Mr McQuillan: I certainly will. The Finance Minister said that he welcomed the debate. He gave a commitment to Mr Swann that he would not roll back rate relief and that it would stay at 80% for the lifetime of the Programme for Government.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Danny Kinahan to wind on the motion.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, vice-principal Speaker — vice Deputy Speaker. That is always a hard one to get around, deputy principal.

I am pleased to wind on the motion. I am amused that Mr Lyttle said at the beginning of the debate that, for all his life, he has been involved in sport. When he reaches my age, he would like to be able to say the same. However, there comes a time when the body will not do what you want it to. I think that we have heard every Member here declare an interest in sport, except perhaps for the Minister, but he has the same fine figure that I have. We may all need to take part in a little more sport.

I remind Members that our motion recognises the benefits that community and amateur sports clubs bring to communities, and everyone here today has recognised that. The motion also notes the vital role that clubs play:

“in encouraging participation in sporting activities and the contribution they make in promoting healthy lifestyles”.

Once again, almost everybody who spoke agreed on that. However, the nub of the motion was the call on the Minister of Finance and Personnel:

“to raise the rate relief afforded to these clubs from 80% to 100% to ensure parity with equivalent clubs in other parts of the UK.”

Members took various angles on their agreement or disagreement, but what we ask for is simply a proposal that will increase the funds that sporting bodies already have to hand by reducing the rate burden.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members not to walk in front of Members who are speaking.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you. To go back to my point, we are really asking the Minister to reduce the rate burden, and to do so in that way rather than through calling for other forms of funding for sporting bodies.

To be gloomy for a little while, most of us talked about the need to be fitter and healthier. This morning, the BBC reported that an “obesity tsunami” was coming our way. Other figures have also come out —

Mr Dunne: No pun intended.

Mr Wilson: I think that the waves are rolling around here.

Mr Kinahan: If they are listening at all. *[Laughter.]*

Each year in Northern Ireland, 2,100 deaths are attributed to inactivity. Tackling obesity could save the health service £8.4 million and reduce sickness absenteeism by 170,000 days — think of the money that is behind that. We are also told that 10 years of life could be added to our average lifespan.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Thank you. He will obviously be aware that our colleague the

former Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure delivered quite a considerable amount of money to sporting facilities and the sporting infrastructure in Northern Ireland, and that will greatly help to address the issues that the Member has just raised. Does he accept that, as arose in the debate, there is no rate relief parity across the United Kingdom? It very much depends on the local authority on the mainland as to whether there is 80% or 100% rate relief.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. I am intrigued by the point, but we are back to splitting hairs. In this case, we are not looking for exact parity; rather, we want parity with the 100% relief so that clubs do not pay any rates, and we want to find a way in which to do that.

I go back to my summary, which is gloomy but important, because it shows what we will save if we get a healthier society. We know that, through a better lifestyle, cancer in two thirds of those who get it can be prevented. There would be less cancer if we exercised more or changed our diet. We should know that 7% of all diseases, one third of cases of coronary heart disease and stroke, and 60% of cases of hypertension are significantly related to obesity.

We heard from many Members about all the other emotional, mental and physical benefits that come from having a healthier lifestyle and participating in sport, all of which are phenomenally important. I am looking at the Minister and wondering why he is smiling at me. We feel that raising the level of rate relief is a very small price to pay. What we are asking for today will cost only £800,000, which is, using the Minister's figures, 20% of the £4 million. Just think of the money that would be saved if people in the community were in better health. Look at the amount of money that will be coming in now as a result of the rates being charged on vacant buildings in, for example, Ballymena. That new rate will generate £2 million, so the £800,000 needed can easily be paid for. Today, we are requesting that the Minister find a way to do this. We believe that reducing the rate burden is a no-brainer.

I will now look at some of the points raised. Mr Hamilton divided the motion into two parts: recognition and action. Taking the sports theme, we could liken it to a game of two halves. We definitely won the first half and played extremely well in the second half. Mr Hamilton mentioned that amateur sports groups are the backbone of our society but that there is a risk in singling out one good cause. He said that there is a complex weighting system in the UK. Nevertheless, we are asking the Minister to find a way of aligning Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK, though we do not have to provide rate relief in the same way. Mr Hamilton is not convinced that it is worth doing, given all the hurdles and barriers that are put in the way in the rest of the UK. I say that we can do it, just in a different, much easier way and with less red tape.

Mr Sheehan said that participation had gone down but that the dividend of having a healthier society was immense. Mr Bradley said that inactivity was costing more and more. He also said that people learn about teamwork and loyalty when they play sports at clubs and that there are many more benefits to be gained, be they mental, physical or emotional. We really cannot put a monetary value on that.

Mr Lyttle, when he was not telling us about the football prowess of Ridgeway Rovers, highlighted the fact that

amateur sports clubs are at the centre of the community. He indicated that he will not support the amendment. He said that the Minister needed more time to explore the issue, and that is really what we are asking him to do.

Mr Girvan said that we should not pin all the responsibility for this on just the Department of Finance and Personnel but on the Health Department and others. He also said that supporting the amendment would mean that local authorities would have to jump through massive hoops. However, my party is saying that we need to find a way of ensuring that we do not put hoops in the way.

Like many others, Mr McLaughlin said that sports clubs are at the centre of the community and that — he was actually making our point for us — the small amount that it would cost to make up the little differential in the fund could easily be found in the Budget. Many more good points were made. Mr Humphrey mentioned Orange halls and the 200 activities provided by over 2,000 groups. I could go on and on. We all recognise the benefits.

I will move on to the Minister's remarks. He said that no one would disagree with the first part of the motion. On the second part of the motion, he said that the Executive, through the Budget, already invest in sporting activities and that he does not agree that the rating system should be changed. He said that an extra 20% of rate relief meant that it could be 84% for more. I want to move away from that, except to mention the best of the Minister's comments, which was his assurance that, over the next four years that he has control of, the rate relief would not be reduced below 80%. We are very grateful for that. Today, we ask him to look at how the rate relief could be increased to 100%.

3.15 pm

The Minister also said that he was unable to examine the issue. Instead, he suggested that DCAL should look at it. My party suggests that the issue is bigger than that: it is about joined-up government, reducing bureaucracy and tackling problems at their source, rather than tackling their symptoms.

Mr Wilson: Perhaps the Member misunderstood the point that I made. The activity to which he refers comes primarily under the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's remit. The reason why I said that is not because I do not believe that there is some interplay between any review that DCAL might undertake and implications for DFP, but simply because it is the lead Department. That is why I suggested that DCAL would take that forward.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up. We have to move on.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. My party —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: You gave way in the last minute. You lost the remainder of your time.

Mr Swann: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Earlier, Mr Kinahan gave way for another Member. Surely he should be given an extra minute.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member had 10 minutes to make his winding-up speech. No additional time will be allocated. I was watching the clock.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the benefits which community and amateur sports clubs bring to local communities; notes the vital role which they play in encouraging participation in sporting activities and the contribution they make in promoting healthy lifestyles; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to examine the rate relief afforded to these clubs.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Flooding: Clogher Valley

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that the Speaker has received a letter from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to say that she is unwell and unable to respond to the Adjournment debate. Unfortunately, on this occasion, it has not been possible for one of her ministerial colleagues to respond to the debate on her behalf. I am assured that her officials are in the Gallery and that they will respond to any questions that are raised in the debate.

The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately 10 minutes.

Lord Morrow: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I have noted your comments on the Minister's non-attendance and her inability to respond to the debate. I understand and accept that there are good reasons why she cannot be in the House to respond to the debate. However, we will continue. I welcome the opportunity to bring before the House the unfortunate issue of flooding in Clogher valley.

In bringing the topic to the Chamber, I am conscious that, during recent heavy rainfall, there were many serious flooding incidents throughout Northern Ireland, not just in Clogher valley. However, in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the Clogher valley area has perhaps suffered as much and indeed more than many others. We have heard of and seen the destruction that has been caused by severe flooding in areas such as Beragh. I want to bring to the attention of the Department and, in particular, the Rivers Agency the serious incidents that have occurred in Clogher valley, where flooding has now occurred on a number of occasions.

One particular incident occurred at Carnall Presbyterian Church, which flooded suddenly while mourners waited in their pews for a funeral service. Indeed, I understand that the funeral service in the church was unable to go ahead in the manner in which it had been originally planned. I ask Members to take a minute to grasp how distressing it was for the family and friends who were attending that very sombre occasion and found themselves having to deal with the funeral service being disrupted by elements that were outside their control. The trauma of a death in the family is difficult enough to cope with, but imagine having to deal with that and then face the unexpected devastation of flooding while trying to take your loved one to their final resting place on this earth. We are appealing to Rivers Agency to take all necessary steps to ensure that there is no reoccurrence of such incidents.

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

I feel that one way forward would be to make available information on areas that are susceptible to flooding. That information must be easily accessed by all areas of media, be it through a computer, a telephone or in person. Indeed, I feel that Rivers Agency should be proactive in alerting residents to be aware of the fact that their property lies in

or near a flood plain. If that information were available at all times, preventative steps could be taken to minimise or greatly reduce the damage and destruction caused by flooding. In a separate incident, a section of a farmer's agriculture building was partly washed away, and the remainder was severely damaged as a result of the flooding in Clogher valley. Of course, there were also incidents of homes being flooded, and the devastation that that causes is never fully understood until one finds themselves caught in such a situation.

I accept that it is not entirely a matter for Rivers Agency but is, rather, a cross-cutting issue that involves the Department of the Environment (DOE), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Regional Development (DRD). Each Department has a significant and useful role to play. The issue of overflowing rivers spilling on to our roads also has to be tackled. We often hear that those floods happen once every 100 years but, in recent times, it is happening much more frequently. I trust that DARD will apply itself to ensuring that the infrastructure is adequate to deal with any potential flooding, and that there is joined-up thinking in the various Departments. Local councils could also play a useful role in co-ordinating.

Recently, there was a meeting — I want to emphasise this because it was a tragedy — of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, and the various agencies were invited to come along and listen to councillors' concerns and respond accordingly. One agency that refused to attend was Rivers Agency. On being invited, its response was:

"Rivers Agency staffing levels could not accommodate the workload associated with meetings of district councils to discuss emergency planning in detail."

We welcomed Roads Service, the Southern Trust, the PSNI and Northern Ireland Water, but Rivers Agency, the most important body in a situation such as that, was missing. Surely it is unacceptable — I believe that it is — that the lead agency in situations such as the one that we are discussing today refuses to attend a council meeting where councillors want to question and receive detailed answers as to why their constituents were left adrift. Surely that is unacceptable by anybody's standards. That was a big disappointment and sent out the completely wrong message to the people of Clogher valley, to Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council members and to the community further afield.

I have since submitted a written question to the Minister asking for a projected costing of the attendance of a Rivers Agency representative at an evening council meeting. It will be interesting to see what the Department says, and I am looking forward to receiving its reply. I did not realise that there was as much involved in sending a representative to a council meeting to give an account of themselves, and I believe that what we were told could be or was close to an excuse. We will not pre-empt the Department's answer, but we will certainly wait with bated breath to see what it says. I do not for a moment accept that Departments are so bereft of resources that they are unable to come to a council meeting and give an account of their stewardship.

If the Minister were here today — I acknowledge that she is ill and that it is impossible for her to be here — I would impress on her the importance of Rivers Agency's role in this matter. I am asking for an assurance that the issue will be investigated thoroughly as a matter of urgency, because

it is totally unacceptable that any Department or agency should refuse to hear the concerns of constituents via their elected representatives, by whom I mean local councillors. It should be said that none of the other agencies, which also face straitened times, proffered any such excuse and were in attendance that evening.

It was notable that Northern Ireland Water sent representatives, who put forward an explanation of its role in situations such as those that we are discussing. Northern Ireland Water was questioned about the new arrangements that it has in place following last year's disastrous lack of responses to people's plight during the big freeze, but full marks to it on this occasion. It presented a comprehensive report on how it intends to deal with a similar situation, should it arise in the future. We commend the agencies that attended and record our appreciation, but a question mark remains over the Rivers Agency's commitment and attitude when it comes to dealing with public representatives, including local councillors.

Although I have been very critical today of the Rivers Agency and its attitude and lack of attendance at the recent council meeting, when I spoke to its representatives by telephone, they were keen to come to the Clogher valley. I am aware that, since our council meeting, they have met councillors in the area and discussed some of the serious issues that concern district councillors and members of the general public.

The Minister has given a commitment that she will respond to the debate, a transcript of which she will receive. She has given an assurance that she will respond in writing to the debate. I look forward to receiving the same, together with assurances that the issues that have been raised today will be addressed and that we will hear from the Rivers Agency of new measures and steps so that the people of Clogher valley, particularly those who have been affected, will not have to endure a reoccurrence of the surge and devastation that was caused during that awful time of flooding.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to have the debate, and I thank the Member opposite for bringing it to the Floor of the House. The debate is timely, given some of the unfortunate difficulties in the Clogher valley in recent times. I pass on my best wishes to the Minister, who is not well. She would have been here if she had been able. I know of her personal commitment to the issue. In fact, recently, on the evening that she visited the residents in Beragh, she also diverted off the road on her way back to visit a householder in Ballygawley who has been flooded three times in three years. That resident's home is beside St Ciaran's College, and the Member will know where that is. St Ciaran's College has been flooded on a number of occasions, which has been very disruptive not only to the school community but to preparation for exams, and so on.

Flooding is horrendous and traumatic. Recently, on a night of very heavy rain, one of my children asked me what we would take with us if our house were flooded. He wanted his farm set to be rescued, and I said that I thought that the baby pictures might be more important. There you go; we all have different priorities. It brings the thought of water flowing through your home and washing away the possessions that you scrimped and saved to buy or things that cannot be replaced such as photographs and memories of your children's younger days. I have been to homes that

have been flooded and seen the devastation, and people were stoically trying to pick up the pieces. When I visited the O'Rourkes' home in Ballygawley, they had set quite a bit of their furniture on crates to try to lift them out of the flood water.

Unfortunately, that was not enough, and most of their furniture was destroyed. The house was absolutely beautiful: you could see the curtains and wallpaper. It was a lovely home, and to have it destroyed by flood waters for the third time in three years was absolutely devastating. It was devastating on a personal level for a family who reared their children in that home and cannot imagine living anywhere else. At the same time, they said to me that evening that it used to be great to lie in bed and listen to the rain on the window and know you were safe and warm inside. However, once you have been flooded, that is never a comfort. Hearing that rain on your window is such a threat because you know that, when you get up in the morning or possibly in the middle of the night, your living room will be under 2 ft of water. The fear that, every time there is heavy rainfall, your home will flood again is absolutely horrifying for a lot of families. That fear cannot be overstated and is probably worse than the fear of fire because, if it happens to you once, you think that there will always be the chance of it happening again.

3.30 pm

Minister O'Neill, on that evening when she was in Beragh, visited that home in Ballygawley. I was very appreciative that she did because all the hype and talk was about Beragh. Although I understand that that project needs to be done and a lot of families were badly affected in Beragh, families and a school community were also affected in Ballygawley. I wanted to ensure that the Minister understood the challenges that we faced in our constituency as well. She was very sympathetic that evening and understood where the O'Rourkes were coming from.

I know from experience that it is very hard to know that you do not have enough money for all the flood alleviation work that you want to do and it is devastating to see the consequences of that. A flood alleviation scheme for Ballygawley has been earmarked and in the pipeline for a period of time. The road infrastructure that was built recently would have had an impact on the timescale, but I am very hopeful that we can get the flood alleviation scheme for Ballygawley and St Ciaran's through in the not-too-distant future.

We also have to recognise and understand the topography of the wider Clogher valley. It is very high up, and the water rushes down Sliabh Beagh. Indeed, not too long ago, I visited another family who live on the banks of the Fury river. That family had built a home. They knew the river and knew that it could get very high at times but there was no history of flooding, at least in that area. As a precautionary measure, however, that family spent £11,000 putting in gabions — crates filled with stones — along the river to shore up the bank. They also erected a fence for the safety of their young children.

One night, a year or two ago, the Fury river got very high, came rushing down the mountain and washed away £11,000 worth of work that the family had invested in to protect their home. Engineers who went out to look at that felt that that work would be enough to secure the land at the

home. When I visited recently, the crater that was left behind when the river rushed through was only a number of feet from their back door. I saw the home in Magherafelt on the TV news last Friday. I am sure that other Members did also. I know how worrying and scary it must be to see your back step literally washed into the river. It really is horrendous.

I welcome the fact that we are having this debate on flooding, specifically in the Clogher valley. I could talk ad nauseam about other examples of flooding. It is an issue that we want to highlight. We want to encourage the Minister to put in whatever resources she can or to persuade the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make more resources available so that flood alleviation work can be carried out on many of those schemes. Flooding may not directly affect thousands and thousands of people, but it can affect people in a way that has devastating consequences for their family and their peace of mind.

I am delighted to be here for the debate. I look forward to receiving the Minister's response in writing. I believe that, by working proactively and together, we can find a solution to this problem and ensure that those families get the peace of mind that they so truly deserve. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Elliott: I thank Lord Morrow for bringing this topic to the House, and I apologise for not being in the Chamber for his entire introduction.

Clearly, this is a huge issue. I listened to Lord Morrow and Michelle Gildernew talk about flooding not only in the Clogher valley area but further afield. It has been a massive problem over the past number of years. If you will permit me, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will highlight some of the broader aspects about flooding and then talk about the Clogher valley issue in particular.

We have witnessed over the past number of years the serious amount of damage from flooding that there has been to this society and to businesses. We can add to that the clean-up costs and the losses that some of those businesses incurred. In the agriculture industry, we have had a long-running debate about the flooding that happened a couple of years ago, which destroyed the crops, particularly the barley, wheat and potato crops. I accept that you cannot mitigate every instance of flash flooding; that is impossible, because it can happen so quickly. However, there are recurring problems that we seem to be having about which more could be done. That must start with ensuring that, whenever new work is proposed, regardless of the Department responsible, we take cognisance of the longer-term affects that that work may have and of its potential to lead to flooding. In other words, if you are making a new road, you should make sure that you have a bridge that is high enough to avoid the water. If there is construction work ongoing, you should make sure that it will not affect an existing floodplain and push a flood risk on to someone else.

I have to say that, for quite a number of years, Departments have not had the necessary foresight. Whenever flooding happens, the Departments take no responsibility whatsoever for it. I see that as a huge problem. There needs to be a joined-up approach in the Executive and between Departments to ensure that we are not left with situations that Departments cause.

There are a number of areas in which there is recurring flooding. In some of those areas, the problem can be resolved quite easily. Like Lord Morrow, I am concerned that the Rivers Agency is not prepared to spend what may in some cases be very small amounts of money to alleviate the problems. Some of the issues have been touched on, but there are several cases in the Clogher valley area. I know of one home in particular that has, I am assuming, been flooded at least six times in the past three years. It is desperate, as Ms Gildernew said, to see the water coming in through the front door and going out through the back door and to see the whole ground floor of the house flooded, causing huge damage. In some cases, the flooding problems could be resolved fairly simply and with small amounts of money, but the agency is not prepared to do that.

There was one instance where a local football club made flooding conditions in an area worse. A local resident explained to the Rivers Agency the problems that would arise from the development, and they have arisen. Even though the Department and the Rivers Agency were warned that there could be flooding, they still allowed the development to go ahead, they still allowed the club to fill in the land, they still allowed it to divert the river or put some sort of pipes in and they allowed the local residents' laneway to flood. It does not flood just once a year; it floods very regularly. The husband in the household in question is very ill and has to go for regular treatment in hospital. His family have huge problems getting him in and out of the home, and often they have to transport him by tractor through the flooded area. That is in south Tyrone.

Once you deal with cases like that, you can offer very few excuses for the Rivers Agency. It now refuses to even meet the family to try to resolve the issue. There are opportunities that Rivers Agency could take at the moment. Clogher Valley Country Caravan Park is an example of a business that was hit badly during the most recent flooding. In fairness, Rivers Agency gave a promise to help it, but I note that that has now been put back for some considerable time.

I want to see action out of all this, not just pretty words. There are opportunities that Rivers Agency, in conjunction, on some occasions, with other agencies and Departments, can take to alleviate serious flooding issues that recur regularly. I ask for that to happen as soon as possible, and I ask that we in the Chamber do not get just nice words or some sort of fluffy response. We need action.

Adjourned at 3.41 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 28 November 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Community Libraries

Mr Speaker: Mr Dominic Bradley has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím le hachainí a chur faoi bhráid an Tionóil ar son Leabharlann an tSruháin i gContae Ard Mhacha.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the members and supporters of Bessbrook library in County Armagh, I present a public petition, through you, to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The petition opposes the reduction in opening hours at Bessbrook library from 24.5 hours a week to 18 hours a week, which is a reduction of 25%.

The House debated the issue recently, and I do not propose to go into the detailed arguments that I made then. However, I will say this: Libraries Northern Ireland has a vision of modern libraries being at the centre of the community and assisting people to attain their full potential. It is highly unlikely that that will be the case for a library that has its opening hours reduced to 18 hours a week. In fact, there is a strong likelihood that such reductions will result in a two-tier library service. Smaller libraries will struggle to deliver even the most basic library service, with minimal community involvement, while bigger libraries, with longer opening hours, will have the time and staff to deliver a far superior service. They will have no restrictions on the level of service to which their users will have access. Eventually, that will result in users from the smaller libraries migrating to the larger libraries, and the foreseen or unforeseen effect of that reduction of opening hours may well be the eventual closure of many of the smaller libraries.

The criteria used to make the decisions to reduce opening hours were neither fair nor equitable. The threshold of 80,000 activities placed libraries that opened for less than 30 hours per week at a severe disadvantage. Although the library service is keen to promote library involvement in the community, no statistics regarding class visits, children's activities or cultural and heritage activities were published. Those activities are at the core of the modern library service as outlined by Libraries Northern Ireland, so it is extremely strange that they were not taken into account when the criteria used in this consultation were drawn up.

The suggestion that there will be consideration of an increase in hours, should money become available, does not hold out much hope. A consideration is no substitute for a commitment, and it remains highly unlikely that the

reduced opening hours will ever be replaced. In fact, many people fear that the reduction in opening hours sounds the death knell of many of those smaller libraries. There is, therefore, a high level of concern among library users in Bessbrook and many other areas served by smaller libraries. It appears that the process used to collect data was flawed and skewed against smaller libraries. As a result of that, we can conclude that Libraries Northern Ireland's proposals for reductions —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very reluctant to interrupt the Member, but, when Members present petitions to the House under Standing Order 22, their statements should be very short. I understand the importance of what the Member is saying, but I ask him to conclude his remarks as soon as possible.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I propose to bring my remarks to a conclusion fairly quickly. As I was saying, the result of this is that Libraries NI's proposals to reduce the hours of smaller libraries are unfair and inequitable and need to be revisited with a view to producing a fairer and more equitable outcome for smaller libraries. The petition asks the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to take such action.

Mr D Bradley moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for information and send a copy to the Chairperson of the appropriate Committee.

Ministerial Statement

Teacher Training

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement about our future teacher training arrangements.

At one level, this is simply about organisational effectiveness. At another, it runs much deeper. It touches our values and traditions, points up the costs of division in our society and raises issues about equality of opportunity. Most importantly, however, it is about the future education of our children and the quality of the provision that we put in place for the training of their teachers. It is therefore an emotive issue that can provoke strong feelings.

The education of our children and young people is fundamental to how our society functions. If we are to achieve a shared, inclusive future, much of that work must take place in school so that sharing, rather than separation, becomes the norm. The only sustainable future is a shared future. I am a strong advocate of increased sharing and integration in our education system, and there are strong economic, financial, social and educational reasons for taking that course of action. This applies equally to the training of our teachers, who are in loco parentis for many hours of the key formative years of a child's life. Shaping the future of teacher training is, therefore, a matter of central, long-term importance. We must approach this issue by doing what is best for our children. The particular organisational structure should flow from that, not vice versa.

The situation we have in Northern Ireland today for the training of our teachers is not sustainable, particularly given the number of unemployed teachers, teachers on short-term contracts and other real financial priorities. In my statement, I want to formally respond to the public consultation on the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, but I will do so in the context of my vision for the future of teacher training provision in Northern Ireland.

The governing body of Stranmillis had become concerned at the perceived fall in pupil roll numbers in schools, the changing financial structures for the college and the challenges that it faced in the future. In July 2007, the governing body engaged David Taylor, an educational consultant and former director of inspection at Ofsted, to provide a report on the long-term strategic options for Stranmillis. In April 2008, after careful consideration of the options, the governing body took the decision, in principle, to merge with Queen's. That was seen as the only option that would ensure the continued viable and sustainable existence of Stranmillis. The merger option has the unanimous backing of the board of governors of Stranmillis University College as well as the full backing of the senate of Queen's University. The merger was strongly endorsed by my ministerial predecessor and was issued for public consultation in March 2011. The merger of Stranmillis University College with Queen's University Belfast to create the Stranmillis School of Education at Queen's would deliver a world-class facility with first-rate teaching, learning and research in a fit-for-purpose estate. There are many advantages to be gained by having a school of education that can bring together teacher training from early years, through primary, post-primary and tertiary levels.

Stranmillis University College's undergraduate teacher education programmes have a high reputation. It brings significant research strength, particularly in early years education, and made an impressive return to the 2008 research assessment exercise. The School of Education in Queen's University has developed the largest doctoral programme in education on the island of Ireland and is one of the leading research schools in the UK. It runs the largest post-primary initial teacher education programme in Northern Ireland as well as the largest masters in education programme. Bringing the strengths of both institutions together would create synergies that would encourage effective and efficient use of resources, enhance the quality of education across all age groups, from early years through to postgraduate, and facilitate quality research.

One has only to look at the example of the merger of the Peabody College of Education and Human Development with Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee — Belfast's sister city. That merger in 1979 united two separate but highly esteemed institutions and enhanced the intellectual and social resources available to their students. Since merger, Vanderbilt has been ranked in the top 20 US universities. Peabody was ranked as the number one graduate school of education nationwide in 2009 and has maintained a place in the top five schools for seven straight years.

The second key driver for the merger is financial. The decision taken in principle to merge was not arrived at lightly and reflected the very challenging circumstances faced by the college. The main income stream of Stranmillis is the block funding paid by my Department on a per student basis. However, the number of teacher trainees in Stranmillis has fallen dramatically. There were 821 trainee teachers at Stranmillis in 2004, and that has fallen to 552 in 2011, a decrease of almost 33%. On the basis of the current numbers of trainee teachers coming through from the Department of Education, the governors believe that the college will begin to incur annual deficits from the 2012-13 academic year. It is estimated that the annual deficit will be in excess of £1 million by 2014-15. Deficits have been avoided in the past couple of years only because of temporary, transitional funding and other factors that are no longer relevant. In addition, the college has substantial capital requirements to enable it to deal with an ageing estate. Current estimates of backlog maintenance amount to around £6 million, and a further £3 million is required for the Henry Garrett building alone, which is currently unoccupied.

My Department has allocated £1.6 million to the college over the current spending review period. That is clearly well short of what is required. The proposed merger represents an unprecedented opportunity to put Stranmillis on a sound financial footing, as Queen's University has undertaken to deal with the maintenance issues and to invest a further £7 million in the estate. That scale of capital investment is not available to Stranmillis other than through the merger.

12.15 pm

Stranmillis and Queen's are already academically integrated. Stranmillis is a college of Queen's University. However, Stranmillis is independently governed and maintains its own administrative and financial structures. The merger would bring Stranmillis wholly within the governance structures of Queen's, and the Stranmillis governing body would cease to

exist upon merger. A number of principles of the merger were also agreed between the prospective partners to protect staff and the position of Stranmillis in a merged institution. For example, both bodies have agreed that there will be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the merger. The staff of the college will be transferred to Queen's on their existing terms and conditions of employment and can remain within their existing pension schemes. Queen's has recently undertaken to protect the transferred posts for up to four years, and existing Stranmillis staff will have access to a voluntary severance scheme.

It has also been agreed that the transferor churches would have a role in the governance structures of the new school of education. An advisory stakeholder forum will be established on which the transferor churches will have guaranteed representation, along with other churches and key stakeholders from the wider education system in Northern Ireland. That has been welcomed by the transferor churches, and it gives them a role that they do not currently enjoy at Stranmillis. The enabling legislation will require that that forum is established and maintained by Queen's. Moreover, the new college would train teachers who are able to deliver the agreed religious education curriculum in any school in Northern Ireland. That will replicate what currently happens at Stranmillis.

A decision to merge two autonomous bodies is usually a matter for those bodies. However, Stranmillis University College needs to be formally discontinued under the terms of the Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 before its assets and liabilities can be transferred to Queen's University. That means that the Assembly must pass the enabling legislation for the merger to proceed. From the meetings that I have had with various stakeholders, I have reluctantly concluded that there is not yet sufficient support in the Assembly to pass the necessary legislation to allow the college to merge with Queen's University. There is a perception that Stranmillis is primarily a Protestant institution. However, Stranmillis recruits students and staff from all parts of our community. The transferor churches no longer have a role in the governance of Stranmillis. In such circumstances, it cannot be described as a Protestant institution. Stranmillis represents the main different sections of our shared community and is therefore non-denominational. I believe that the proposed merger, even taken in isolation, would be beneficial for community relations. The Community Relations Council has recognised the benefits that the merger would bring and stated in its response to the public consultation:

"Education in Northern Ireland has a crucial role to play in reconciliation, peace-building and conflict transformation. Our vision for education is one where the opportunities for meeting, sharing and collaboration are maximized on a cross community basis...we welcome this proposal to merge the Stranmillis College and QUB as it will have both economic, social and reconciliation benefits for our society."

In the event that the Stranmillis/Queen's merger does not proceed, the outlook for Stranmillis University College is bleak. The college does not have access to any funding streams that would deal with the estate issues that I referred to earlier, nor would it have the resources available to invest in staff or to improve its student experience. Academic standards would most likely suffer. If the number

of trainee teachers being allocated each year continues on its downward trajectory, the impact on Stranmillis will be significant and a financial crisis will soon be upon us.

I do not have any additional funding for Stranmillis. My departmental budget is already under considerable pressure, and I have many competing demands to deal with. As Members are aware, with the support of the Executive I achieved a funding package to both sustain university funding and freeze tuition fees through finding greater efficiencies in my Department and securing budget transfers from other Departments. How could I justify distorting my budget when there is already a surfeit of trained teachers and the number of teaching jobs may decline further? How could I justify that when there are such pressures on my employment service? Therefore, until the merger takes place, Stranmillis University College must manage its own affairs as best it can.

I am grateful that Queen's University remains a willing party to the merger, and I am sure that both institutions will continue to work closely together in the interim. I believe that, as soon as there is sufficient political support to pass the enabling legislation, the merger should proceed. It will be a significant first step towards a more rational, shared and integrated system, and it could not be viewed as prejudicial to any wider reforms that could follow. Therefore, I remain committed to moving the merger forward as soon as possible with the support of the Assembly.

In considering the Stranmillis and Queen's merger, I have taken the opportunity to take a step back and ask much more fundamental and searching questions regarding our current teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Although the teacher training numbers and academic requirements are set by the Department of Education, the funding of the institutions falls to my Department. At present, teachers are trained in five separate institutions in Northern Ireland. That seems excessive for a region with a population of 1.8 million people and must be viewed in the context of the changing landscape around the need for qualified teachers and the number of school-aged children. Of the five institutions, in addition to Stranmillis, St Mary's University College is the other dedicated teacher training college. St Mary's is a faith-based institution and prides itself on being part of a worldwide network of Catholic higher education institutions. The histories and circumstances of the university colleges are different. Like Stranmillis, St Mary's is an autonomous body and did not take a decision to consider any merger. It was never part of the current merger proposal. There are, nevertheless, issues relating to the future of St Mary's. I will address those issues shortly.

I know that St Mary's has a proud tradition and history in west Belfast, and I am confident that higher education provision will continue to be delivered on the site. However, it has long been my view that there should be a single integrated teacher training system in Northern Ireland. There is no reason that our teachers should be trained in separate institutions. I realise that we have different education sectors, but that does not mean that we should not take opportunities, when they arise, to move towards a more sensible arrangement. All schools must deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum, and all schools are inspected by a single inspectorate. Professionally trained teachers should be able to teach in any educational context, irrespective of the prevailing ethos in the school.

In the course of my considerations, I have concluded that there are wider issues that I wish to address. At the heart of those is how best to achieve a more shared, integrated and financially sustainable landscape for the delivery of teacher education. I also want to examine associated issues, such as equality of opportunity for all those who enter into and qualify from the teacher education sector.

Students from whatever part of our community can apply for places in any of our higher education institutions, and gaining a place is based on academic achievement. Most students apply via the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS). However, St Mary's does not use that service and has a separate application process. That leads to a situation in which Stranmillis may give offers to students who also hold an offer from St Mary's. Some will opt to choose St Mary's, resulting in Stranmillis having to fill some of its final places through clearing, despite having been oversubscribed initially. There is also potentially a risk of graduates from the two colleges having different employment prospects. That is particularly acute in a declining and more competitive market for teachers.

At present, teaching positions in the Catholic maintained primary sector require the applicant to hold the certificate in religious education. That certificate is taught at St Mary's, and students there can elect to take it along with their initial teacher education. I understand that the vast majority of students at St Mary's elect to take the certificate, as they wish to gain employment in the maintained sector. Students at St Mary's do not pay a fee to take the certificate. At Stranmillis, there is no course of study leading to the award of a certificate of religious education. However, Stranmillis students can opt to take a distance learning course from Glasgow University that leads to the certificate. I understand that a small number of students from Stranmillis take the course, and they are funded by my Department. Therefore, we have a situation in which all the necessary teaching and support to gain employment in the maintained sector is offered by one of our university colleges, while students at the other must undertake a distance learning course to obtain such requirements. Although students at Stranmillis are not out of pocket when they take the course, they are at a disadvantage, as the course is not delivered or supported in their teacher education institution.

When it comes to finding a teaching position, graduates from St. Mary's can take up a post in any primary school in Northern Ireland, as they will have the certificate in religious education. However, a Stranmillis graduate can take up a teaching position in a maintained Catholic primary school only if he or she has taken the certificate in religious education by distance learning. The situation could be addressed either through measures to remove the capacity for schools to require the certificate or through ensuring fairer and more ready access for students to the certificate across all institutions. It is in the latter option that the interest and remit of my Department lie.

In financial terms, both university colleges are in a precarious position. Owing to a decline in teacher numbers, as determined by the Department of Education, the university colleges have increasingly relied on additional support funding from my Department. In particular, they were permitted to recruit students to a number of non-teacher training degree programmes. I have direct control of the number of non-teacher training places, and the funding

associated with those places represents considerable financial income for the institutions. In the current year, there are 277 non-teacher training students at Stranmillis, for which my Department provides a grant of almost £1.1 million. That represents over 20% of the total grant support given to the college. There are 286 non-teacher training students at St Mary's in the current year, for which my Department provides a grant of almost £1.1 million. Again, that represents 20% of total grant support. In addition, a premium is paid on each teacher training student at each of the two university colleges, totalling around another £1 million for each institution.

Moreover, since 2008-09, my Department has provided conversion funding to Stranmillis to help keep it sustainable. In the last year in which it was paid, the funding totalled £171,000. In the current year, my Department has paid £208,000 to the college to ensure that it sustained the required efficiency of no more than 6%. The combined effect is that, in recent years, my Department has provided between £10 million and £11 million to the two university colleges by way of block grant each year. However, only just over half of that total relates to the training of teachers.

In Northern Ireland terms, the funding of two separate university colleges is, therefore, a clear cost that we all bear as a result of the division in our society. The matter is further compounded by the fact that teacher training education also takes place in three universities in Northern Ireland, and do not forget that Northern Ireland students are trained as teachers elsewhere in the United Kingdom and return here to seek one of a diminishing number of jobs. If we examine figures for 2009-2010 for those graduating with a Bachelor of Education from the university colleges who were employed in a teaching capacity six months after graduation, we can see that 41% of them were employed on a short-term contract lasting less than 12 months. A further 27% were employed on a temporary contract. Only 10% of the graduates gained a permanent teaching contract within six months of graduating.

Recently, my colleague the Minister of Education announced that there were around 50,000 unfilled school places in Northern Ireland and that that could rise to around 80,000. The Department of Education is conducting a review of the number of schools. All our schools need to be sustainable, and the school estate requires some rationalisation. Although that is clearly a matter for the Minister of Education, it is very likely that it will have a direct impact on the number of teachers required to staff the system in coming years. After all, it is also the Minister of Education who determines the number of new teacher training places each year and allocates those to the five providers. Over the past few years, the number coming into the system has declined from 846 in 2005-06 to 663 in 2011-12. For Stranmillis alone, the drop has been from 230 intakes to 160, representing a reduction of 30%. The indications are that the numbers will further decline or, at the very least, remain static. Thus, both university colleges are in a weak financial position, and the likelihood is that that position will get worse as time goes on.

I believe that, as currently constituted, their sustainability is in question. Indeed, I must consider the value for money of the various subsidies, in light of other pressures and opportunities.

12.30 pm

I contend that the training of teachers in Northern Ireland in the current system is inefficient and that our funding could be used better by the teacher training institutions if they were prepared to move towards a more shared and integrated system. Therefore, I am today announcing a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

I am well aware, Mr Speaker, that the Minister of Education has a clear interest in teacher education, particularly with regard to delivery and academic considerations, and that he is considering a number of relevant issues. The work that I am announcing today will not preclude any changes that may flow from my colleague's Department.

The first part of my study will be an objective analysis of the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. Essentially, that part of the study will consider the affordability of the current system and the rationale for the various funding streams, benchmark costs and models of delivery with other jurisdictions, and seek to forecast whether the institutions are sustainable into the future, given the current demand for teachers, the number of qualified teachers in Northern Ireland and the future demographic trends in the school-age population. The second strand of the study will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education.

We need clarity on the way forward for teacher education in Northern Ireland, and I am sure that the current teacher training providers would welcome that. All providers will be included in the study and all will be given the opportunity to express their views, present arguments and evidence and help to shape the outcome of the study.

The study will be carried out by persons independent of my Department, and I am anxious to have it carried out as quickly as possible. My desire is to facilitate, create and agree a shared system of teacher education. I am not going to be prescriptive of the type of sharing and integration that may be recommended by the study. Areas for consideration should include services, facilities and teaching. Issues regarding equality of opportunity and equality of access also need to be addressed. I am also conscious of issues relating to ethos and diversity in society, and any shared system would need to respect and address areas such as language, art, history, culture and sport.

As mentioned, I am aware of the potential interfaces between the study that I am announcing and the work of the Department of Education. I am mindful of ministerial responsibilities, remits and limitations and I will respect those boundaries. I am also aware, however, that the interests of our Departments may overlap on some teacher education issues, particularly around stage two of my Department's study, and I will ensure that my officials and I liaise closely with our counterparts.

In conclusion, I believe that the current system of teacher training is neither affordable nor sustainable. That is why I believe it is essential to carry out the study and to produce an objective analysis of the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. However, I think that it needs to be undertaken in order to inform the debate on the funding of the teacher education system into the future.

I am convinced that the best way forward for Northern Ireland society is to develop a fully integrated education system comprising an integrated system of teacher education. However, I know that I cannot deliver that by myself. The views of others, including, in particular, the various stakeholders, are critical. I will, therefore, remain open to all reasonable suggestions and recommendations. I emphasise that that does not necessarily mean a single provider. My vision provides for a plurality of provision where it makes economic sense to do so, but it means that we should take opportunities when they arise to move towards a more sensible arrangement than the current profile.

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

My priorities are clear. Teacher education must contribute to a world-class education system. It must be financially efficient, sustainable and affordable and it must reflect our vision that children are educated through a system that is inclusive, open and shared. As I said at the outset, we owe nothing less to the future schoolchildren of Northern Ireland, as well as to the future teachers in our society.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): You will appreciate, Mr Speaker, that that was a long and comprehensive statement by the Minister. There are a few points worth making for context.

First, the Minister has rightly identified that there are concerns about the loss of the Protestant ethos in Stranmillis if it were to be merged. It is also fair to say that there is a question regarding Stranmillis's merger if St Mary's were not to merge. In fact, I wonder why you are going for a study when the figures so blatantly obviously show that the numbers are not there to sustain two colleges.

Secondly, the Committee has taken representation from a number of people, and there is concern about the fact that one of the teacher training colleges is not part of UCAS while the other is, and that seems to give some imbalance. Finally, the issue of the certificate seems to preclude certain sections of student teachers from gaining employment in certain areas, and that appears to be unfair.

Taking it all in the round, however, I am disappointed that we have set out the problem but have more or less left Stranmillis hung out to dry. Stranmillis must find its own way. The issue comes when I ask you a specific question. The additional money for non-teacher training for students at Stranmillis is £1.1 million. Will that be withdrawn and will it also be withdrawn for St Mary's? Although you are going through with the study, is there no way, for the sake of those learning and teaching there and for the children of Northern Ireland, that we can find some form of temporary financial solution that will not make this the disaster that it looks to be?

Mr McElduff: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Points of order will be taken after questions on the statement.

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair for those comments. I will run through them in order. The potential merger of Stranmillis will not result in a loss of ethos. Let me be clear: Stranmillis is not a mirror image of St Mary's. Once the transferors left the board of governors, Stranmillis became formally a non-denominational institution. However, I stress that with regard

to the proposed merger, a stakeholder forum will represent transferor churches plus other faith backgrounds. In some senses, that aspect will be enhanced if the merger goes ahead.

I have set out in detail the issues regarding UCAS and the Catholic certificate. I am mindful that we have a lack of equality of opportunity and equality of access.

Stranmillis has certainly not been hung out to dry. I strongly endorse the merger as the best way forward. The study that I am announcing today should in no way be seen as delaying the merger of Stranmillis and Queen's. Indeed, if we were to move ahead with that merger, I do not believe that that would in any way prejudice the conclusions of the wider study. We can move ahead on parallel tracks. Once it is clear that the Assembly supports the enabling legislation for the merger, I will come straight away with that legislation and the merger will proceed. Until then, I am happy to work with all the stakeholders, including political stakeholders, to ensure that we have that level of support. I would like to think that the serious bleak financial situation that Stranmillis faces will be a factor in those discussions and in reaching a successful conclusion.

With regard to the additional resources going into Stranmillis in the short term, I am uncomfortable with that line of thought. I am pointing out a very inefficient system of financial support for teacher training, one which, I believe, is not sustainable in the future, particularly when we are under severe financial pressure across Northern Ireland, including in my Department. I have grave difficulties in advocating the shift of resources from elsewhere to do that. Indeed, there was a lot of discussion in the news this morning about problems with the schools estate and the cuts to school budgets. How can we tell the schoolchildren of Northern Ireland that we will take money from elsewhere to prop up an already inefficient system of teacher training?

The additional resources that my Department provides to Stranmillis and St Mary's are of deep concern, and I do not believe that they can be sustained in future. We need to go about this in a measured and appropriate way. It will be through the scoping study and the discussion around how we provide a more shared and sustainable system that we will address that issue.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members, we have a lot of questions to get through, and I ask Members to be concise. From now on, Members should only ask questions.

Mr Buchanan: In the introduction of his statement, the Minister used all the key bywords when he talked about "equality of opportunity," "sharing, rather than separation" and when he said:

"The only sustainable future is a shared future."

Yet, he seems keen to press forward by advocating a merger with between Stranmillis and Queen's that would exclude St Mary's. That, I believe, defeats the entire purpose.

Focusing on what the Chair of the Committee said, and given that the Minister has met with the Finance Minister to get extra funding for things such as the cap on student fees —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr Buchanan: — extra student places in the north-west and other policy issues, will the Minister give the House

any indication of what contact he has had with the Finance Minister to discuss extra funding for Stranmillis? Why is Stranmillis continually the Cinderella in his Department?

Dr Farry: In my statement, there are lots of words that relate to sharing in education. I mean every word that I say about that sharing and about equality of opportunity. If you read through the detail of the statement and consider it, you will see that I am setting out a road map by which we can achieve real sharing in our teacher training provision in Northern Ireland. It is about real delivery and how we move forward on the shared educational agenda. A number of parties have referred to the need for that, in the Chamber today and in other recent debates, so let us move ahead with that.

I do not believe that moving ahead with the merger of Stranmillis and Queen's is in any way prejudicial to wider reforms in the system, and I am strongly pushing ahead with that agenda of wider reform. The issues and problems in our teacher training landscape are much broader than the current financial problems that are faced by Stranmillis. We have a very inefficient system, and as a Minister with a responsibility for using public resources wisely, I have great difficulty in standing here and justifying what is, in effect, a major subsidy from my Department that reflects a divided system and the divided society in Northern Ireland. We must change and we must build a shared future.

I have secured the extra funds from the Executive for tuition fees; that is essentially a done deal. However, I have had no discussions with the Finance Minister on additional funding for Stranmillis, and I have a major moral difficulty in putting more money into an already inefficient system. In my Department, I have problems with the employment service; we need to spend a lot more money in that area, and I am struggling to hold the line in that regard. Other Ministers are also facing up to real difficulties within their portfolios. How can we justify to the people of Northern Ireland our taking money that is needed elsewhere and putting it into one area because we are not prepared to move ahead with the merger of Stranmillis and Queen's? That merger will provide a financial rescue package for Stranmillis and it will stop it from being, in the words of Mr Buchanan, the "Cinderella."

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I think that the Minister is trying to close St Mary's by stealth. He will not have my or my party's support for that, so good luck with that.

St Mary's is a first-class university. It has been on the Falls Road for 110 years, it is second to none and has some of the best employment rates for students who graduate and go into the workforce. Consultants' reports also clearly show that St Mary's is viable with added numbers.

Why does this announcement deal only with two universities, and not the three other universities? Is the Minister afraid of the other universities? He is sailing very close to going down the road of sectarianism on this matter, and that is wrong.

Dr Farry: I much regret the language that Mr Maskey has used. This is about building a shared system in Northern Ireland; it is not about sectarianising any debate. We want to move forward in a way in which we respect everyone's background and diversity but we also want to move forward together on a shared basis. I have not set out any agenda for the closure of St Mary's. I respect the role that St Mary's

has played throughout its long history in training teachers in Northern Ireland. I also recognise its high academic standards. I have set out the need to address a financially unsustainable situation. That applies as much to St Mary's as to Stranmillis. St Mary's is financially viable today only because my Department — the public purse — significantly subsidises it. Its core teacher training funding provision constitutes only half of St Mary's budget. The other half comes from the funding of liberal arts students and a premium of £1,500 that we pay for each place, reflecting how small St Mary's is as an institution. We have to consider that in the round to compare what we are doing there with other jurisdictions, and ask ourselves whether that is wise.

12.45 pm

We should look to the future system and study carefully the end of my statement in particular, in which I referred to my personal opinion that we should have an integrated system. I also stated my clear commitment to respect and to take on board the views of other stakeholders. We could have a single system or a shared system, and within that shared system, we could have a plurality of providers. That does not amount to an agenda to close St Mary's. However, we must make sure that the overall system in Northern Ireland is fit for purpose and financially sustainable.

Mr McDevitt: In April 2003, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education began a joint study, *Teacher Education in a Climate of Change: The Way Forward*, which went out to consultation last year. In fact, consultation on it closed a year ago today. Will the Minister tell us what the future is for that strategic review? Will he further inform the House why it is not a joint review conducted by his Department and the Department of Education, as both are so obviously directly affected by its output?

Dr Farry: That review is primarily the responsibility of the Minister of Education. However, I understand that it is due to report in the very near future. The review looked primarily at how we reached conclusions on our requirements for teacher training numbers and academic standards. The measures that I announced are separate from that. They look at issues of affordability from a financial perspective and how we move ahead to reshape the institutional landscape. I said clearly in my statement that I respect the responsibilities of my colleague on the Executive, and we will co-ordinate what we do around the two reviews. Indeed, I met the Minister of Education in advance of my statement today. In particular, when we reach the second stage of that study, the Department of Education will be an integral partner in how we take it forward.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his statement and acknowledge that he is one of the few Ministers in the Executive to recognise in detail the cost of division, in this case in relation to teacher training in Northern Ireland, to the taxpayer and to his Department. He has also set out an opportunity for the Assembly to show that it pays more than lip service to its commitment to a shared future and that it will deliver change to tackle a broken system. Will the Minister, therefore, elaborate on his vision of what a shared and integrated teacher training system in Northern Ireland would look like?

Dr Farry: I thank my colleague for his question and remarks. We can talk about a range of different models. We can have

a tight, single integrated system. Equally, we can have different models of sharing. We can have a loose sharing model or much tighter versions. I think that areas about which we can have discussions would include shared services and shared facilities, such as buildings and sports facilities. Also, and most critically, we can talk about shared teaching: future teachers being trained in the same room as their counterparts from different institutions, should we have them. We already have models in the secondary system in which schools are collaborating. Those may well provide lessons that we can draw on. This has to be an open debate. I have my own personal preference as to what I believe is in the best interests of Northern Ireland but I am here as one of many and I am open to hearing the views of others, including the stakeholders of the system as we find and shape a model that works for the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his statement. He said that his:

“desire is to facilitate, create and agree a shared system of teacher education.”

Does he believe that starving Stranmillis of funding and continually treating it as a second-class citizen to St Mary's is the best way of achieving that?

Dr Farry: I am at a complete loss as to where the argument that I am starving Stranmillis of resources is coming from. At present, we are funding trainee teachers at Stranmillis. We are also pumping in additional resources that are nothing to do with the training of teachers. We are paying a premium for each teacher training place, reflecting the fact that we have small institutions in Northern Ireland. My predecessor decided to invest in non-teacher training academic courses at Stranmillis, which, again, is another form of subsidy going into the system. Stranmillis and St Mary's are being treated fairly and equally in that regard. The bottom line is that they are both receiving a significant subsidy from the public purse that is nothing to do with the training of teachers, which is their core responsibility.

I have grave difficulty in justifying, in a society of 1.8 million people, having five different teacher training institutions. I do not believe that that is efficient. Stranmillis's finances are falling due to Northern Ireland's circumstances. It is not because we are taking money away from the college. The fact is that we have a declining market for teachers in Northern Ireland and a major legacy issue of required investment in the site. The Queen's University merger allows us to address those issues without the public purse having to pump in additional resources. Why on earth are we walking away from that opportunity? Why are we making arguments that we have to take resources from elsewhere in a very tight Northern Ireland Budget in order to prop up something that does not need to be propped up in the way that the Member suggests?

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I do not know whether I welcome the Minister's statement but I thank him for making it. With the niceties out of the way, I agree with him that St Mary's has a proud history and tradition. I will continue to support St Mary's in its endeavours.

Some of the parties here need to go back to look at the history of their involvement in Stranmillis because they supported the merger at that time. Does the Minister agree

that when Stranmillis's board of governors announced in 2008 that it would merge with Queen's University, it did so without the Assembly's support? Will he outline whether, at that time, the board of governors — although it did not have the support of the Assembly or the Committee for Employment and Learning at the time — was supported by the Department and its officials?

Will the Minister clarify whether the independent study will be truly independent, considering the rewriting of the student fees review —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It is really just one question.

Ms S Ramsey: That review was rewritten to suit the needs of the Department at that time to ask for an increase in student fees. Will students be involved in that study?

Dr Farry: First, we are already seeing polarisation in the Chamber. One side is standing up for Stranmillis and the other is standing up for St Mary's. The point is that we need to focus collectively on the way forward for the system as a whole. Let me be clear about what the study is going to do. It is in two stages; the first is a financial review, which will go out through the normal public procurement processes externally to the Department. It is there to provide an independent look at the financial realities that we are facing.

The second phase of the study, which will be about shaping the future system, will be led by independent experts from the Department. My Department has had a long-standing interest and involvement in the proposed merger. It has been on the agenda since before the restoration of the Assembly in 2007. It is a long-running issue, and it is to my deep regret that we are still at the stage that we cannot proceed with it.

With regard to student fees, I believe that the Member would agree that, at the end of the day, we have reached a politically and, indeed, economically sound solution. That was very much done with the full support of my officials and all political parties in the Chamber.

Mr Ross: In his statement, the Minister announced a two-stage study into the viability and sustainability of both St Mary's and Stranmillis. However, he also suggested that Stranmillis will be starved of finance ahead of that study. Surely, the Minister is putting the cart before the horse? If the study is to have any real meaning, the Minister must continue to support Stranmillis until its conclusion. Can the Minister give that guarantee in the House today?

Dr Farry: I do not propose to take any more funds from Stranmillis ahead of the various stages of the study. Members have gotten the notion that Stranmillis is being starved of finance. It is being starved due to circumstances that it faces at present, not through any action that I or, indeed, my predecessor has taken as Minister. Indeed, we have pumped money into Stranmillis to keep it viable — funding that is actually difficult to justify at any time and particularly when we all face difficult finances. Therefore, circumstances are working against Stranmillis with the falling number of teacher places. That is a reflection of how society is changing.

It is also worth stressing that teacher training is not a priority skill area. Northern Ireland does not have a shortage of teachers. There are shortages elsewhere in the system.

Therefore, if we talk about the wise use of resources, surely that is about investment in future scientists and engineers who will propel the knowledge economy in Northern Ireland forward, not in more teachers?

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. Until such a time as there is political consensus on how to move forward, the Minister should agree that his Department must do more to meet Stranmillis's funding needs. In fact, he says in his statement:

"In the event that the Stranmillis–Queen's merger does not proceed, the future outlook for Stranmillis University College is bleak. The college does not have access to any funding streams that would deal with the estate issues that I referred to earlier".

The Minister said that there will be funding of £1.1 million this year. Can he assure me that that funding will continue next year and the year after that?

Dr Farry: Current funding arrangements will continue pending the outcomes of the study and consideration of the way forward. I must return to the issue of pumping more money into Stranmillis and ask people where they would like me to take that money from? Do they want me to take it from the universities, which are trying to reorient themselves to invest in the future needs of the economy? Am I to take it from the further education sector or the employment service? Many people express concern about the current situation of Steps Ahead as part of the Steps to Work programme. I remind Members that a growing number of people are unemployed and need support to find work. Therefore, where exactly do Members want me to take money from to pump into a situation that is already financially unsustainable?

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. In the context of St Mary's wanting to retain its autonomy, I ask the Minister whether the chairman of Stranmillis University College has lobbied him to facilitate a merger between St Mary's University College and Queen's University. Furthermore, has the First Minister lobbied the Minister directly on the future of St Mary's? My question really is: who is actually setting the agenda on the matter?

Dr Farry: The facts of the matter are that I have met the chairman of the board of governors of St Mary's. It is fair to say that he did not lobby me in that direction or in any particularly strong direction. I have discussed the merger with a number of stakeholders. I have not had a meeting with the First Minister in that regard, although I have had a meeting with the leader of the DUP. I have also spoken to the leaders of a number of other political parties on the matter, on the basis of which I reached the conclusion that the required level of support does not exist.

Let me be clear: the statement that is before the House is my statement and mine alone. It has not been dictated to me by any political party whatsoever. It reflects my analysis of the situation in which we find ourselves at present.

1.00 pm

I will return to the detail of the statement: I inherited the situation of the Queen's and Stranmillis merger. However, in considering what I inherited, I took the opportunity to ask much more fundamental and searching questions about

future teacher training provision in Northern Ireland. That has led me to the conclusion that I have set out today and to the road map through which we can build a shared teacher training infrastructure.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. In April 2008, Department for Employment and Learning officials presented the board of governors of Stranmillis with financial projections based on a new funding model, and those pointed to large deficits in the future. Then we had the merger proposal. Does the review, which is three years later, have a preordained outcome, and will we hear that DEL officials are to present the board of governors of St Mary's with similar financial projections?

Dr Farry: Given that our Department funds both university colleges, our officials are in regular contact with both about their finances. The Stranmillis board of governors is acutely aware of the projections, and it is worth stressing that the merger has not been imposed on Stranmillis. The board of governors elected for the merger, and, indeed, support for it on the board is strong and unanimous.

Mr Douglas: Does the Minister agree that there is no political agreement in the House? Does he also agree that the two-stage study should consider a much stronger working relationship between Stranmillis and St Mary's?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Douglas for his question. The study can be open-ended in the context of all the different models of sharing, and closer co-operation between Stranmillis and St Mary's or between Stranmillis college at Queen's and St Mary's is one potential scenario. Equally, we could have a single system for Northern Ireland. All the potential scenarios are on the table for discussion. I have a personal preference on the way forward, but, equally, I want to respect and listen to other stakeholders' viewpoints. The current system is not sustainable: we have to change it. The status quo can no longer be accepted in the light of the subsidy and the waste of resources, so we have to talk about a shared system. Let us talk together about how we shape that system in the interests of society as a whole.

Mr Storey: Does the Minister agree that part of the reason that we have ended up in this situation is because the previous Ministers who held the post agreed to very questionable intake numbers at St Mary's? They failed to address the discriminatory nature and practice of having a Catholic certificate, and Sir Reg's best attempt at dealing with the issue was to suggest that we have a Protestant certificate, at which he failed. There is nothing in today's statement that tells us how we will deal with the inequality of St Mary's —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr Storey: — having the best of both worlds with UCAS. Will the Minister clearly set that out for us? That has to come to an end, irrespective of whether we have a review.

Dr Farry: It is fair to say that we could have reached this situation quicker if some decisions in the past had not been taken, and it seems to me that, over the past number of years, we have pumped more and more resources into both teacher training colleges in an attempt to make them sustainable while the demographics have been working against us and against the whole notion of having two separate colleges. However, we are where we are today.

Having a different type of certificate would be a major retrograde step and totally contrary to the whole notion of a shared future and, particularly, a shared education system. The way forward is not to replicate what is happening in one section of the community but to have a totally level playing field across the community. I have indicated that, as part of the study, particularly the second stage, we have to address the equal opportunities issues, including UCAS and the Catholic certificate. Indeed, Members may be aware that UCAS has recently published a consultation document about moving from the use of predicted grades to actual grades for university entry. That would be a positive measure, and it would be much more in tune with equality. Some of the reasons that St Mary's cites for not using UCAS might well be addressed through the adoption of that approach. However, in the interim, my Department is willing to engage with St Mary's on the issue of UCAS to try to persuade it to join that system at the earliest opportunity, which is the 2013-14 academic year.

Ms Lo: Having heard the responses from both sides of the House, I really believe that it takes an Alliance Party Minister to get the public confidence that is needed to carry out a bias-free investigation or review into the teacher training system. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Lo: Will the study look at the UCAS system and the issue of the Catholic certificate?

Dr Farry: I thank my colleague for her opening remarks. To a certain extent, I addressed the UCAS issue in response to Mr Storey's question. We can address the issue of the Catholic certificate in a number of ways. From an equality perspective — an area that lies outside my Department's control — legislation could be put in place that would prevent the certificate from being used as a requirement for the appointment of teachers by any school in Northern Ireland. However, given that that requirement continues to exist, we need to look at ways in which we can ensure that people have free access to it. If we are to have a shared rather than a fully integrated model, one potential way of addressing that would be for St Mary's, which currently provides the certificate to its own students, to offer that option to any trainee teacher in Northern Ireland through some sort of service level agreement. That is perhaps one creative way in which we could address the lack of equality.

I am not trying to interfere with the ethos of schools; I appreciate that those exist. Equally, any teacher, irrespective of their own religious background and belief system, should be capable of teaching in any school in Northern Ireland, even one that has a particular ethos and which may not necessarily reflect the personal views of a teacher. We are talking about professional teachers, who will teach as professionals.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his lengthy statement. He said:

"Therefore, until the merger takes place, Stranmillis University College must manage its own affairs as best it can."

Is he not, in effect, blackmailing Stranmillis College?

He talked about the values and traditions of colleges. Given that the Officer Training Corps was forcibly removed from freshers' day at Queen's University, how can the Minister guarantee that the unique heritage of Stranmillis College will be preserved in such a merger?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Humphrey for his question. I am not blackmailing Stranmillis at all. Stranmillis wants the merger to proceed; it is incredibly keen that it does. Stranmillis is probably very frustrated that there is not yet support in the Assembly for the merger. The way out of the difficulty in which Stranmillis finds itself is for the Assembly to support the enabling legislation that will allow the merger to go ahead. I do not have the resources to put into Stranmillis, and those who are advocating that I should seek to divert resources from elsewhere need to tell me where I am to take those resources from. I have pressing needs across my Department. Indeed, the entire Executive and every Minister have pressing needs. I have difficulty with pumping in additional resources in further subsidy to reinforce what is a divided system because there is not support, particularly from the Member's party at this stage, to move ahead with the merger — a merger that is good for the system and for Northern Ireland and moves us in the direction of shared education that his party is trying to advocate but which has so far not lived up to whenever it has an opportunity to buy in and support a progressive move.

Mr Easton: Will the Minister give an assurance that, under his review, the Catholic certificate of education will be done away with because of its discriminatory nature against those from a Protestant background? Is he aware that some staff at Stranmillis have been put under extreme pressure by the board of governors that, if they speak out against the merger or express concerns about it, they will be sacked? Will he give an assurance to the Assembly that he does not support that discriminatory action by the board and that his Department will investigate the board's actions in regard to the threats to teachers?

Dr Farry: I stress that Stranmillis is an autonomous body that manages its own affairs. I believe in freedom of speech and people being able to express their opinions. A number of staff members took the opportunity to respond to the consultation. I have also received delegations of staff members — those for the merger and those expressing views against it. So, I am certainly happy to listen to all opinions.

The staff in Stranmillis also need to reflect on what is in the best interests from their own perspective with regard to employment. The principles of the merger will protect staff at the point of merger and for four years thereafter. That is a very attractive proposition. By contrast, moving ahead in the absence of a merger means that there are no guarantees for anyone and Stranmillis and its staff are in a very precarious situation.

With regard to the Catholic certificate, my statement showed that I understand the situation where there is not equality of opportunity as a result of the current provision. I do not have it within my power as Minister for Employment and Learning to remove the requirement for the certificate — that lies elsewhere. What I can do, however, is to encourage the system to move to a situation whereby it is made accessible on a much more fair and equitable basis. I hope that the second phase of the study will capture the need to do that.

I have already set out one potential way in which that can be done, and there may well be others.

Lord Morrow: The Minister told us that he is simply building on the work of the previous Minister, Sir Reg Empey. He also stated that that would not in any way impinge on the ethos of the Protestant culture or community. That is not what the Equality Commission said in its report, which states:

"We have reservations in relation to the potential impact on the availability of training places for teachers from the Protestant/Other communities, the ethos and proposed governance arrangements for the new structure."

That is in complete contradiction, Minister, to what you said here today. Furthermore, the report goes on to state:

"There is the real possibility that the outcome of the merger may mean that fewer places will be available for training teachers from the Protestant community."

How does that stand in the light of what you said here today, or is your statement simply an aspirational one?

Dr Farry: I thank Lord Morrow for his question today and for all the questions for written answer that preceded it. Let me stress that I am not building on the legacy that I inherited from my two predecessors. What I inherited was support for a merger on very narrow grounds between Queen's and Stranmillis. It did not address any of the issues regarding the Catholic certificate, UCAS, the financial sustainability of the system overall or the opportunities in the system for sharing. Those are all new things that I, as the current Minister for Employment and Learning, am bringing to the Chamber with regard to the way forward. This is a real process. This is not about aspirations but about real pounds and pence and an unsustainable financial situation that the House has to grapple with, and I am certainly up to grappling with it as Minister.

Let me be clear about the issue of ethos: Stranmillis today is not a Protestant institution; it is a non-denominational institution. It is not a mirror image of St Mary's, which is a faith-based institution. The balance of the enrolments of the two colleges is very different. St Mary's intake is still predominantly Catholic, and we need to think about addressing that. Stranmillis is much more mixed, and Queen's is also a mixed institution. So, we have one mixed non-denominational institution potentially merging with another mixed non-denominational institution.

1.15 pm

That said, I am acutely aware of the concerns about differential opportunities for different parts of the community in teacher training. The merger and, in particular, the wider scoping study regarding a shared system will address that particular concern. I understand the argument that Lord Morrow is making in that regard.

So, ethos issues are going to be addressed in the merger. At present, the transferors do not have any say about the board of governors at Stranmillis, but as part of the new merger a stakeholder forum is on offer, which will represent the transferors and all of the other faith traditions in Northern Ireland. So, they will have a new voice in future provision.

Mr Allister: I thought the Minister's statement to be quite churlish and vindictive in regard to Stranmillis. It

would seem that, frustrated in his ambition to eliminate Stranmillis, the Minister now hopes that financially it will bleed to death. Would it not better suit the Minister to face the fact that the merger is not viable, support Stranmillis and, instead of talking it down, try building it up? Does he agree that a good start, as a confidence-building measure within Stranmillis, though it is an autonomous body, would be the resignation of the present chairman of the board of governors and the replacement of him with someone who actually wants Stranmillis and wants it to succeed?

Dr Farry: Members need to be very careful about second-guessing the views of Stranmillis. Stranmillis will be most disappointed by the views expressed by Mr Allister and others in the Chamber today who are seeking to frustrate the merger with Queen's University. The merger is the only viable way forward for Stranmillis. The college is not viable, not through any action that I have taken or have failed to take, but due to the reality and the circumstances that we find ourselves in in Northern Ireland today. That situation has to change.

The merger with Queen's is backed unanimously by the board of governors — more than just the chair of the board of governors; the entire board of governors. It also has the overwhelming support of the staff in Stranmillis and the support of the unions. The people in Stranmillis are not the ones who are against the merger; the people in this House are the ones who are against the merger.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his statement. Almost the entire statement was on Stranmillis, St Mary's and Queen's University, with only a fleeting reference to other providers of teacher training. In my own constituency, the University of Ulster provides a very effective and efficient postgraduate certificate in education. Will the Minister outline where other providers, such as the University of Ulster at Coleraine, fit into his proposed study?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McClarty for his comments. Certainly, it is true to say that, while the statement did focus on Stranmillis, and St Mary's to an extent, we have five providers of teacher training, including the University of Ulster at Coleraine.

My officials have been in touch with the vice-chancellor to brief him about the contents of what I am setting out today. I very much envisage the University of Ulster being part of the scoping study, particularly the second stage on how we map out the future. While I am not being prescriptive about the eventual shape of teacher training provision in Northern Ireland, we have the option of moving ahead with either a single integrated system or a shared system in which we have a plurality of providers. The University of Ulster is very much in our thinking in that regard.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I found some of the Minister's responses this morning to be a bit disingenuous, because Sinn Féin has consistently supported education at Stranmillis and St Mary's and has never supported the merger — not in this mandate or the previous one.

When the Minister stated in the House that the liberal arts course could be consolidated elsewhere in the university system, I believe that that was motivated by a wish to make

St Mary's unviable. Does the Minister agree that the liberal arts course at St Mary's offers students, and students from low-income backgrounds in particular, an excellent degree course that meets not just their needs but those of our business community?

Dr Farry: Michelle Gildernew's comments about offering people from a range of different backgrounds access can be applied to any of our universities. I am not being prescriptive on the way forward. It is equally fair to say that the provision of liberal arts at St Mary's and the equivalent provision of early years at Stranmillis are, in effect, subsidies that are keeping small institutions viable, and the question is whether that is the right thing to do or whether it would be better to consolidate those types of courses in some of the other providers. That is an open and frank discussion that we have to have, and I am not sure why Members are afraid to engage in it.

Earlier, I said to the Member's colleague that I am not approaching this matter with an agenda of attacking St Mary's or, as some wish to portray it, of trying to undermine or close the college. I am trying to find a system for Northern Ireland that is fit for purpose and financially sustainable. At present, we have a very financially inefficient teacher training system, and it is becoming increasingly hard for me to justify that, particularly in these times. We do have to have a discussion on the best way forward; and there is a situation in which St Mary's can find a new home as part of that shared system. However, we have to be frank about the current financial context and ask ourselves whether we are getting value for money. I would like to think that every Member in the House would be very careful with the money that we receive and is aware of ensuring that we maximise it for best use for the people of Northern Ireland as a whole.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions on the statement.

Mr McElduff: On a point of order, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning was the first Member called to pose a question to the Minister and was called in his capacity as Committee Chairman. Was there not an obligation on the part of Mr McCrea to speak as Committee Chair when called and to differentiate when he was speaking in a party political capacity? At no point in his contribution did he reflect the concerns of the Committee.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As the Member knows, it is not up to me to say what the Committee's business should be, but it is an issue that would be dealt with by the Business Committee. I leave the matter to Committee members.

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

That the Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

At present, any landlord who enters into a voluntary agreement with Land and Property Services (LPS) to collect rates from tenants gets a 15% allowance for his or her trouble. The exception is the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), which, since April 2011, has received a lower allowance of 10%. The allowance rewards landlords for undertaking the task, which is a good deal for my Department because it saves LPS having to chase individual tenants to recover rates. That would be an expensive and unfulfilling task for the agency, and revenue would be at stake.

The allowance is granted because rates are payable by landlords under the agreement whether the property is occupied or not. With the introduction of the rating of empty homes, 100% rates will apply to all domestic properties. There will be no difference, generally, between occupied and vacant liability for that property. As a result, it would be inequitable to maintain the current level of voluntary landlord allowance, given that part of it is compensation for being unable to claim a vacancy. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to retain that element of the allowance.

The allowance covers around 155,000 rental properties in the private and social rented sectors. The allowance has changed over the years, and in 2007, under direct rule, was increased from 10% to 15%. That came following a 2005 study by the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation that recommended that the increase should apply to all landlords except the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. That was due to the fact that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is not subject to the same level of commercial risk for non-payment and vacancies.

However, due to uncertainty at that time over the review of public administration (RPA), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was temporarily granted the benefit of the higher 15% allowance. As I stated, that allowance has now fallen to 10%. In 2009, the Assembly agreed to my Department's taking the power to reduce the level of the voluntary allowance in conjunction with the wider policy to rate empty homes, forming an impetus to review the allowance awarded. Following consultation, there was clear majority support for the level of the allowance to be higher in the private rented sector compared with that for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and housing associations.

We need to strike the right balance in all this between encouraging landlords to pay rates on their properties and avoiding the situation where LPS has to chase individual tenants. That would result in reduced revenue and increased costs.

Bearing all those factors in mind, I considered that the allowance payable to housing associations should be reduced to 10% from April, which is the same as applies to the NIHE. Housing associations have been given an

extra year in which to prepare for the reduction in the allowance. In the private rented sector, the allowance will continue at a lower rate than before, at 12.5%, given that there are separate considerations around collection and transient tenancies. That rate remains slightly higher than that awarded elsewhere, and it reflects the consultation outcomes that were agreed last year. It would be given effect through this order.

Members will also be interested in the financial impact of the changes for the Assembly and for district councils. Reducing the allowance to 10% for housing associations and to 12.5% for private sector landlords from April could provide savings of around £1 million in 2012-13. That sum will be split fairly evenly between the Executive and district councils. Although there has been an increase in the numbers availing themselves of the landlord allowance, which will offset the gains somewhat, the overall result will be that collection performance in the rented sectors will be improved.

The impact on all landlords will mean that there will be an increase of between £16 and £24 for each property per annum, and, more generally, the change in the voluntary landlord allowance will not affect the overall rates liability on a property, which will, of course, remain the same. It simply means that the level of allowance that is granted to the landlord is being adjusted. On that basis, there should be no impact on tenants, as the landlord should have collected the full rates liability already. My Department will, of course, monitor the situation as necessary.

Let me turn to the more technical details of the order. Article 1 sets out the title of the order and gives its operational date as 1 April 2012. Under article 21(1) of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977:

"The owner of any hereditament the rent of which becomes payable or is collected at intervals shorter than quarterly may by agreement...with the Department undertake that he will pay the rates chargeable in respect of the hereditament whether it is occupied or not and the Department may agree, where the owner so undertakes and pays over to the Department on or before the date or dates specified in the agreement the amounts payable by him thereunder, to make him an allowance not exceeding 15 per cent."

Article 2(1) will reduce the maximum amount of that allowance to 12.5%. Article 2(2) will also provide that an allowance of 10% should be substituted for any allowance specified in the existing agreement for a hereditament owned by a housing association. For private landlords, an allowance of 12.5% will be substituted, and article 3 will revoke the current legislation dealing with the voluntary landlord allowance.

I look forward to hearing Members' comments, and I commend the order to the Assembly.

1.30 pm

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The policy proposals in the statutory rule were considered by the Committee on 5 October 2011. The Committee noted that the purpose of the rule is to reduce what is commonly known as the landlord allowance, which

applies where the landlord has entered into an agreement to pay rates on a property. For private rented sector landlords, the allowance will be reduced from 15% to 12.5%, while the allowance for registered housing associations will reduce from 15% to 10%. The changes will apply to domestic and non-domestic properties. The Committee had no issues to raise in respect of those proposals.

The Committee formally considered the statutory rule on 16 November 2011, together with the accompanying report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2011 be affirmed by the Assembly. On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Setting aside my Chairperson's role, my primary function as a member of the Committee is to scrutinise the work of the Minister of Finance. In that regard, I found his remarks at the weekend disgraceful. Speaking as a former prisoner, I felt that they were demeaning to him as a Minister and demeaning, by association, to the entire Executive. I would go so far as to say that it demeaned his audience, although many of them did not have the wit to realise it.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Those remarks bear absolutely no relation to the issue of rates. He should have been called to order immediately.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Girvan: I will speak to the motion as presented, which the Minister has put forward in exactly the way in which it was presented to Committee. The Committee had no issue with it. I also speak on behalf of the DUP. At the outset, I declare an interest as a landlord who takes advantage of the current 15% allowance, which will be reduced to 12.5%, when collecting rates from tenants.

The proposal would bring some additional revenue to the Executive, and I appreciate that some of that money will be used in other areas. The process we have gone through opens up the opportunity for further money to be brought forward. I appreciate that there may be a necessity to look at trying to bring matters more in line so that the 10% allowance offered to housing associations will be the same for a private landlord. I realise that there are difficulties because of vacant properties and the difficulty that some landlords are having in paying for those due to the country's economic status. However, we have no issue in relation to the motion.

Mr Wilson: I thank Members for their contribution to this short debate and for the support that this measure had from the Committee.

Since the issue was raised, I am glad to see that I can still get under the skin of Sinn Féin. It pleases me to have got the response that I did. I remind the House that the imagery of children being placed in "Long Crèche" was not something that I made up. I thought that maybe Sinn Féin had had a humour transplant before its last conference. It was Sinn Féin that called the nursery "Long Crèche"; I simply followed up on that imagery. I am sure that many people across Northern Ireland will be as amused as some of my party colleagues were by the comments that I made at the party conference. I have no apology to make. The imagery was placed in my mind by Sinn Féin. If they did not

want that, perhaps they should not have done it. I am glad to see that they did not take exception to remarks about the former Education Minister Caitríona Ruane. I assume that they agreed with everything that I said about her. I commend the order.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Committee Business

Standing Orders

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The next four motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders. I propose to conduct the debate as follows. I propose to group motions (a) to (d) as detailed on the Order Paper and conduct a single debate. I will call the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move motion (a), and a debate will take place on all four motions in the group. When all Members who wish to speak have done so, I will put the Question on motion (a). I will then ask the Chairperson to move formally motions (b), (c) and (d) in turn, and I will put the Question on each of them without further debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

(a) *Leave out Standing Order 49A and insert*

“Committee for Justice

(1) The statutory committee established to advise and assist the Minister of Justice (in this Standing Order referred to as ‘the Committee for Justice’) shall –

(a) review the operation of the amendments made by Schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009;

(b) report on its review by 30 April 2012; and

(c) include in its report any recommendations it has for changes to the way in which judicial office holders are appointed and removed.

(2) A person cannot be a member of the Committee for Justice if that person is a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, a district policing partnership or a subgroup of the Belfast district policing partnership.”

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(b) *Leave out Standing Order 49B. — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]*

(c) *In Standing Order 59, leave out paragraph (4A). — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]*

(d) *In Standing Order 65(6) line 2, leave out*

“, if he or she thinks it necessary, adjourn the Assembly without question put or suspend any sitting for one hour.”

and insert

‘ (a) suspend the sitting until a later time on that sitting day; or (b) adjourn the Assembly without question put.’ — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am pleased to bring the four motions to the Assembly. The proposed changes to Standing Orders are all primarily technical changes, so there is not a lot that can be said, except to explain the background and purpose of each of them.

Of the four, the first three are loosely connected in that they relate to the Committee for Justice and the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC). The first of the three relates to a Standing Order on the establishment of the Committee for Justice; a second facilitates moving an existing Standing Order; and a third seeks to transfer duties that are currently the responsibility of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee but should now fall to the Committee for Justice. The fourth motion is unrelated to the first three. It proposes a minor change to the Standing Order that deals with grave disorder in the Chamber and how that is managed by the Speaker. That may seem a strange combination of proposed amendments to bring together, and I clarify at the outset that it is purely for expediency rather than any other reason.

As three of the four motions relate to the Justice Committee and the AERC, I will begin by introducing those. The first of the motions relates to Standing Order 49A, which currently sets out requirements for the establishment of the Committee for Justice. With that Committee now up and running following the devolution of policing and justice powers in April 2010, the need for the Standing Order no longer exists. In the future, just as happened after the elections earlier this year, subsequent Committees for Justice will be established in exactly the same way as all other Statutory Committees. That process is set out in existing Standing Orders 47 and 48. That means that Standing Order 49A is now considered spent, and the first motion proposes that it be removed and replaced with a new Standing Order 49A. That will simply be entitled “Committee for Justice” and will deal with other matters relating to the Committee.

The next two motions relate to the proposed contents of the new Standing Order 49A. The amendments suggest that new Standing Order 49A will be made up of two paragraphs. Although it may seem slightly out of sequence, I will follow the order of the motions and deal with motion (b) next, even though it deals with the contents of the second paragraph. The second paragraph of the new Standing Order 49A will contain exactly the same wording as the paragraph previously numbered Standing Order 49B. The paragraph sets out a list of office holders who are not eligible for membership of the Committee for Justice. That includes members of the Policing Board, any district policing partnership or a subgroup of the Belfast District Policing Partnership. Because those requirements remain relevant, the motion recommends that they be included in the new Standing Order 49A. The Committee on Procedures is well aware that the title “district policing partnership” will be replaced by the title “policing and community safety partnership”. However, as that is likely to be enacted only in April 2012, it was agreed to bring that minor change separately at a later date, rather than waiting until then to make today's changes.

I move now to the contents of the first paragraph of the new Standing Order 49A. Motion (c) seeks to allow the information currently held in Standing Order 59(4A) to form the first paragraph of the new Standing Order 49A. It does that by proposing the deletion of Standing Order 59(4A) in its entirety. Why has that been done? In its current position, the existing Standing Order 59(4A) sets out specific functions relating to judicial appointments legally imposed by schedules 2 to 5 of the NI Act 2009, but it currently confers those responsibilities on the AERC. With

the establishment of the Committee for Justice, both the AERC and the Justice Committee agreed that it was more appropriate that those functions now fall to the Committee for Justice and therefore instructed the Committee on Procedures to amend Standing Orders to reflect that decision. The motions before you today facilitate that transfer of responsibility.

Far simpler than the first three motions is the fourth and final motion. It deals with instances of grave disorder and, again, proposes a mainly technical amendment. At the moment, Standing Order 65(6) states that the Speaker can suspend the sitting or adjourn it without Question put for one hour. The Standing Order, in its current form, does not allow flexibility in the time allowed. However, there may well be cases in which the matter could be dealt with in a shorter time or when more time would be appropriate.

When considering possible amendments, the Committee agreed that it was appropriate to provide flexibility and allow the Speaker discretion in the time that can be allowed for suspension or adjournment. The discussion also included whether it would be suitable to leave it as implicit that any suspension or adjournment would be effective only up to a later point in that day's sitting. However, the Committee agreed that it was more appropriate to make it explicit. It is the result of all those discussions that you see in the amendment proposed to the House today.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, before you are four fairly technical amendments proposed to Standing Orders. The first removes a spent Standing Order. The second deletes a Standing Order, as its wording is to be contained in new paragraph 49A. The third reflects the decision made by two Committees as to where responsibility falls for carrying out legal requirements conferred by the 2009 Act. The last amendment, while relatively simple, provides flexibility in the time permitted to the Speaker in dealing with instances of grave disorder and brings the Assembly into line with other legislatures. It also potentially allows better use of the House's time. I recommend the motions to the Assembly.

Mr Allister: I will be relatively brief. I want to speak to the first motion to amend and to make two points.

Members will note that the Standing Order as drafted begins with the affirmation:

"The statutory committee established to advise and assist the Minister of Justice...shall".

My first point is that, whereas the House contains many avid supporters of the Belfast Agreement — some long-standing, some more recent — that wording in itself, which comes out of the 1998 Act, is a dilution of what the Belfast Agreement stated in relation to scrutiny in the House. Paragraph 9 of the Belfast Agreement, in fact, stated that Committees were to be established for the purposes of scrutiny and policy development and to have a consultation role. The 1998 Act diluted that to a role to advise and assist the Minister of Justice. Our Standing Orders now follow that and create the reality that the Committees in the House are not scrutiny Committees, a situation made all the worse by the fact that they consist, in virtual totality, of those from the government parties. The Committees do not even have the scrutiny role because that was not translated into legislative form. Their role is defined as being to carry out proactively supportive

tasks in respect of the Minister. Those are not challenging tasks or scrutinising tasks but proactively supportive tasks.

In that context, we have the proposition that we should transfer to the Department of Justice, the look, if there is to be a look, at schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009. Schedules 2 to 5 to the 2009 Act made the changes to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 that removed, quite properly, the anticipated role of the First Ministers in relation to judicial appointments. The Standing Order seeks to enable the Committee for Justice to re-examine that. I want to make it clear from my perspective that there is not and should not be any basis on which to re-examine the processes pertaining to judicial appointments, if the re-examination is minded and intended to bring them within the ambit of the House or anyone who holds office in the House.

1.45 pm

Mr T Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I welcome the opportunity to conclude on this very short debate, given that only one Member wished to speak in it. I thank the Committee Chairperson for opening the debate, albeit that it was short. The nature of today's motion means that there is little that I can add to what has already been said, except perhaps to summarise.

As the Chairperson said in her opening remarks, motions (a) and (b) are technical amendments that need to be made to Standing Orders now that the Committee for Justice has been established. Motion (c) puts into effect an instruction from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, and Standing Orders should be amended to reflect the decision of the Chairpersons of the Committee for Justice and the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which confers responsibility for matters relating to the appointment of judicial office holders, as set out in schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009, on the Committee for Justice. Motion (d) relates to the suspension or adjournment of a sitting in the event of grave disorder and, if agreed, will allow the Speaker more flexibility than is currently available in naming the time for which the suspension will be in effect.

Mr Allister is the only Member who spoke in the debate. He referred to people who came to this slightly later in respect of the St Andrews Agreement. It is interesting to see that he resides here today and is quite content with the workings of this institution, although he had an opportunity to raise concerns in the Committee. I know that I was absent on one occasion, but there is no reference in any of the papers that I have read to him raising concerns about the wording that was used. I know that he made reference to its being a scrutinising Committee. Indeed, we have scrutinised some forms of Standing Order that have come to the Committee, and there have been various opinions. In my view, that is scrutinising, and, if Mr Allister was not satisfied with the words on that occasion, that would have been the opportunity to suggest an amendment. I commend the motions to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that all four motions require cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) Leave out Standing Order 49A and insert

“Committee for Justice

(1) The statutory committee established to advise and assist the Minister of Justice (in this Standing Order referred to as ‘the Committee for Justice’) shall –

(a) review the operation of the amendments made by Schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009;

(b) report on its review by 30 April 2012; and

(c) include in its report any recommendations it has for changes to the way in which judicial office holders are appointed and removed.

(2) A person cannot be a member of the Committee for Justice if that person is a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, a district policing partnership or a subgroup of the Belfast district policing partnership.”

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) Leave out Standing Order 49B. — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) In Standing Order 59, leave out paragraph (4A). — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(d) In Standing Order 65(6) line 2, leave out

“, if he or she thinks it necessary, adjourn the Assembly without question put or suspend any sitting for one hour.”

and insert

“- (a) suspend the sitting until a later time on that sitting day; or (b) adjourn the Assembly without question put.” — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Private Members’ Business

School Closures: South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Easton: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the school closures announced within the South Eastern Education and Library Board area to date; is concerned that the board is making these decisions ahead of the outcome of the review of schools being conducted by the Department of Education; is further concerned that, unlike all other education and library boards, this board is run by commissioners with no political input; and calls on the Minister of Education to intervene on this important matter.

At the outset, I want to let Members know that we will accept the SDLP amendment. The basis of the motion is equality, equity and the fair treatment of schools, parents, children, teachers and communities, amid the publication of the audit of the schools estate announced by the Education Minister on 26 September.

On 26 September, the Minister of Education made a statement to the House ordering an immediate audit of every school in Northern Ireland under the sustainable schools policy, ‘Putting Pupils First’. He stated that it might result in school closures and that a report would be issued by the end of December on the same issues. One week after the Minister’s statement, the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) announced that it was proposing to close several schools, one of which was Redburn Primary School in my constituency of North Down. Other schools earmarked for closure included two in the Ballykeigle, Knockmore and Dunmurry High School areas. Those announcements came prior to the publication of the audit ordered by the Minister and represent a decision taken by the board on its own initiative.

I will give some background on the structures of the South Eastern Education and Library Board. It functions like no other board in Northern Ireland. It is not subject to the same democratic and governance framework as the other four education and library boards. On 6 July 2006, members of the South Eastern Education and Library Board failed to agree actions necessary to fill the requirements of a resource allocation plan to live within their budgets which were the subject of a Department of Education directive. As a result, the Department of Education suspended the board and appointed four commissioners to carry out the functions of the board. A number of those commissioners are not local, it has to be said. They travel over every month from the UK mainland to attend meetings and make decisions. That reminds us of the form of government we had prior to

the establishment of devolution in this region of the United Kingdom, which came under the title "direct rule".

Oddly, as the decision to appoint a board of commissioners was taken by a direct rule Minister only one year prior to the establishment of the Assembly and Executive, in which Education was taken by a Sinn Féin Minister, we now have a second Sinn Féin Minister enacting a direct rule decision. It is, therefore, unfortunate that normal governance practices have not been adhered to in the South Eastern Education and Library Board some five years on, when the issue with regard to a budget has essentially been resolved.

In an Adjournment debate on Tuesday 25 October, Jonathan Craig, a Member for Lagan Valley, passionately raised the issue of the closures of Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School in his constituency. During that debate, Mr Craig challenged the Minister, who was present, as he is today, on the legality of the board, as, under the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, a newly constituted education and library board should have been appointed in 2009. The Minister responded to that query in the debate by stating:

"the SEELB has legal authority. I also wish to see the end of commissioners in the South Eastern Education and Library Board. I want a democratic structure for education, and I believe that we can and will achieve that." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p127, col 2].

I, for one, welcomed the Minister's statement to the House on that day in October, but what has he or his predecessors ever sought to do to bring that about since May 2007? Where is the equality in all of this? With due respect to the commissioners, none of them, bar, perhaps, one, will have a full knowledge of all the factors surrounding the case of each and every one of the schools earmarked for closure.

Having worked previously in the health service and having served on the Assembly's Health Committee and as an Assembly Private Secretary to the Health Minister, I know, as will anyone, that, when a doctor looks at a patient for the first time, they need to be fully aware of all the facts before making a diagnosis. The same can be applied to Redburn Primary School. Here we have a group of commissioners playing God with the school, its children, its teachers and its parents without knowing all the facts. The announcement of the proposed closure of Redburn Primary School has caused significant upset and anger in the Holywood area where the school is situated. Many people have already written to the South Eastern Education and Library Board highlighting their opposition, and I encourage people to continue to do so, as that appears to be the only form of democracy open to them as a community.

Redburn Primary School serves an area of social and economic disadvantage, and, to date, the community and the school leadership have established an excellent partnership, much of which has been pioneered by Redburn Primary School, which is seeking to put something into the community that it serves. It is like no other school in that field. It must be cherished and encouraged. However, it will be destroyed if and when the school closes its doors next year. Redburn Primary School serves the children of soldiers in Palace Barracks as part of its community, and many of their children benefit from the educational standards of that school of excellence. Furthermore, Holywood Primary School,

which is the nearest school, requires significant work to bring it up to standard. A proposal for a newbuild linking a number of schools was put in place and supported but remains at a standstill due to the Tory-led cuts that we have to endure from Westminster.

Looking to the future, Holywood is set to benefit from new housing schemes in the Loughview estate area, and I hope that the Minister takes that into consideration. New army units are also expected to arrive in the coming years, with new families and young children needing a school nearby. All those factors are at play. However, the board has decided to ignore them and the needs of the local population.

Minister, this is about a process. The current board is not democratic, and that needs to be sorted out. We need to make the board accountable to the Assembly and the local parents and teachers. I ask you, Minister, to take note of my comments and to look favourably at stopping the process until your review is complete.

Mr McDevitt: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "Minister of Education" and insert

"to postpone any decisions until the viability audit has been completed."

I thank the Members who tabled the motion for accepting our amendment, which seeks to give a sense of completeness to the debate around schools that are under threat and how the Minister and boards can best and most fairly manage the decisions that they may need to take over the next year or so.

I echo Mr Easton's sentiment that the situation in the South Eastern Board is undemocratic and unreasonably out of kilter with proper governance arrangements. It has endured for way too long. It is unacceptable that we should have a system that lacks any form of proper political representation for as long as has been the case in the South Eastern Board, even though the system requires that in its statute. It is particularly regrettable that matters should have come to a head around four specific schools and that those four schools are faced with imminent decisions, even though the Minister and the Department have initiated a separate process to establish the viability of all schools in primary and post-primary education at a regional level. That begs the question of what is the most effective way of getting a picture of the needs of our population and our children in the next decade or two to be educated in the highest-quality schools positioned at the heart of every community and capable of delivering the pastoral and curriculum support that we all demand as legislators. Surely, to arrive at that place, we need a joined-up, co-ordinated look at which schools face challenging circumstances, where those schools may be, what their prospects might or might not be in the next five, 10 or 15 years, the communities that they service and what their needs will be in the short and medium term, and the potential challenges or opportunities that may arise with regard to new structures of governance or different systems of management.

2.00 pm

Surely we want to develop a holistic approach to establishing where, if anywhere, rationalisation should take place. Unfortunately, that has simply not been the case. Despite the fact that a viability audit process is under way,

boards seem determined to proceed with development plan processes that they have initiated, and it seems that files on which he is invited to take decisions are routinely being sent to the Minister. The motion, if amended, will ask the Minister to wait at least until he has the outcome of the viability audit before making those decisions. That would give him a regional perspective and a subregional perspective within each board area of where the potential issues may lie. It would also challenge us all — the Minister and the House — to explore what models could best be put in place to ensure the viability of the maximum number of schools and to consider whether federations should be established, whether amalgamations would provide a better solution or whether, unfortunately, some closures are inevitable. It is a matter of deep regret that some boards, particularly the South Eastern Education and Library Board, appear determined to progress with closure processes, even though so much else is happening at a regional level.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

I have had occasion to meet parents from two of the schools referred to in the motion: Ballykeigle Primary School in Strangford and Knockmore Primary School in Lagan Valley. What I find striking about my engagement with both sets of parents is the opportunity for those schools to become sustainable in the long term. Moreover, among parents and teachers — teachers were involved in both meetings that I attended — there is great commitment to making those schools a part of their community and to sustaining them as such. The parents and teachers are not ignorant of the challenges that the institutions face. They know the serious issues around governance and leadership, and they know that they will have to face up to some financial realities. They are also not ignorant at all of the fact that change may be necessary for them to survive.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that the proposal to close Ballykeigle Primary School was taken in undue haste and that the board did not await the outcome of the Minister's overall review of primary school education in Northern Ireland?

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr McCarthy for his contribution. He is correct, and I hope that the Alliance Party will accordingly support the amendment.

All that we ask here is that we start to pull this together. I give the Minister credit for having shown a fair degree of leadership in wanting to tackle the significant problem that exists. What we need now is a degree of depth in facing up to whatever the viability audit might throw up as to where the challenges may exist in our schools estate. However, we cannot really form an opinion on any of that until we get the results of the audit, and simply looking at the results will not be enough, because we will then need to think laterally about what the best solution is in each case.

I am sure that my party will support the Minister if he is willing to be open-minded, community-centred and child-centred, as he often states that he is, and to be sustainably driven in trying to find solutions for the communities and schools that may face challenges as result of the viability audit. However, let us have that debate, and let us not lose schools that may have a great future just because they are caught in a different cycle. In this case, that cycle has been driven by a board that lacks democratic accountability,

has been on the wrong side of governance for too long and enjoys little support in the community.

Having proposed and spoken to the amendment on behalf of the SDLP, I appeal to colleagues on all sides of the House to support the motion as amended.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion but feel obliged to point out that the first part of the motion is premature, in that it refers to school closures “announced” in the board area. No school closures have yet been announced. Schools have certainly been told of possible closures, but nothing has been signed off, and a process must still take place. That is not to say that there are not aspects of the motion with which I have sympathy. I agree with the proposer of the motion about ending the use of commissioners in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area. We all want an education structure that is robust, accountable and democratic. It is to be welcomed that that is being progressed and political leadership is being shown. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will ensure effective, efficient arrangements based on democratic accountability.

Members know that, before any school closes, a development proposal has to be published and a process must take place that allows parties to submit their views. We await such development proposals coming forward. The viability audit should be with the Department in a month's time. I will be interested to hear from the Minister how that work is progressing. The audit will give rise to an overall picture of where we are with education provision, and decisions will have to be made for the ultimate benefit of our children's education. We need to bear that in mind in these debates and as we progress the necessary changes in education. As representatives, we should base our approach to the process on evidence, not emotion, and on what is best educationally rather than adopt a not-in-my-backyard approach.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. I accept that the issue has to be dealt with on the basis of evidence. Given the correspondence to be sent to schools over the next few days, does he not agree with me that that evidence clearly points to the fact that we will have fewer teachers in place; that that will have a massive impact on the decisions that can be made to benefit children; and that that will compound the problem faced by schools in the board area that we are discussing?

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

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for his intervention. There is no doubt that all Members are fully aware that we need to deal with the financial situation that we are in, which has an impact on such matters. We need to develop a sustainable schools estate. We need an education system that deals with the issues, such as 85,000 empty school places, and ensures a top-quality education system throughout. We cannot and should not stand over any schools that are not delivering on education, particularly at post-primary Key Stages 4 and 5.

The educational needs of children in schools, not the needs of an institution or school buildings, must come front and centre. For too long, we have had arguments about education, and many political representatives have rushed

to back a local school on the basis that it is a local school. It has to be about the quality of the education and the sustainability of schools.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for allowing me in again. I accept — the Minister knows it — that he finds himself in a very difficult budget situation. What we are going to do now will make it nearly impossible for some schools to deliver the standard of education that, we say, we desire for our schools. The financial straitjacket placed around them will not ensure the delivery, in some places, of good education for our children.

Mr McKay: I think that the Minister will speak about that area. That issue needs to be taken into account. It is a challenge, but we need to be up for that challenge, and I am sure that the Member would agree with me on that. However, leadership is needed as we move forward with the process. I welcome the fact that we have been more progressive in recent education debates — in the Chamber and in Committee — in looking at how we reach the goal of providing a top-quality education system.

There will be challenges for Members in relation to schools in their area, but we cannot stand over schools that are failing, that continue to fail our children and have no chance of coming out of that situation. Every day that passes in which we do not address the 85,000 empty school desks or deliver on the ESA increases the cost not only to the Department's finances but to a child's education. More generally, in terms of the amendment, we should not stand over the postponing of all decisions pertaining to schools and nor should the Minister of Education. If schools are found to be failing children, the Minister would not be acting in the best interests of children by overseeing a situation in which that cannot be arrested.

I am conscious of the time. It has been worth having the debate today, but the fact of the matter is that we need to ensure that the boards, regardless of the representation issues, carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McKay: That must not include standing over failing schools.

Mr McNarry: The Ulster Unionist Party supports the amendment. Well before Greece and Italy were put into the hands of appointed technocrats as opposed to elected politicians, the SEELB followed that same route. Yet within the past week, even the technocrat administrators appointed to run that board have thought better of closing local schools and have postponed their earlier decision.

I have said before that any school closures ahead of a school audit commissioned by the Minister are ill advised and should not be embarked on by local education boards. However, now that the boards themselves are to be closed, surely they should not be in the business of closing schools. If ESA is to operate — I hope that it will — surely it should have the right to make such recommendations and to do so only on a Northern Ireland-wide basis on the back of area plans that form part of an education plan for the whole of Northern Ireland, not on the bitty, piecemeal area plans drawn up by those now-defunct boards.

In addition, I have significant concerns about the operation of rural proofing in this education reform and school closures scenario. At what point in this process is rural proofing applied? If it is applied only at the initial stage, when the policy guidelines that govern school viability and closures are set, it is not rural proofing in any meaningful sense at all. Rural proofing must be applied to every closure because the impact of each school closure will be different depending on how localised the solutions proffered to replace the existing structures are to be. To apply rural proofing too early in the operation is not to apply it at all.

I remind everyone that one third of our population lives in rural areas. That is why rural proofing was introduced in the first place and why it must be operated properly. In my experience, the SEELB has a very fine chief executive, a senior, practical person without whom, many like me fear, the board would be a rudderless ship. I contend, however, that, since 2006, three appointed commissioners have continued in office. At the time of their appointment, the reason given was that the board, including elected representatives, failed in its duty to serve that system. Five years on, without intervention or resolution, it seems to me that someone has taken their eye off the ball. The House could well do with an explanation of those reasons from the Minister today. I ask the Minister, first, whether he is absolutely sure that his own house is in order for allowing commissioners to remain in place for such a long time and, secondly, whether he is confident that a challenge to their competence in recommending school closures would not be held up in court. I do not know the answers to those questions, but I feel that clarity from the Minister would be helpful.

No matter how you look at it, the board pushed the destruct button on schools that it had targeted in a predetermined manner. It said that it was following rules and procedures that it alone had set. The Minister has already admitted in the House that he did not know what the board was doing. It alone decided to ignore the Department's decision to initiate a schools validation audit. I ask the Minister whether all schools that are recommended for closure by the SEELB's officers — I use that term correctly — are to be subjected to a review under the schools validation audit process. Will he tell the House whether those schools are to be treated in the same way as other schools? Will the audit overrule the board's initial recommendations?

2.15 pm

It is clear: those commissioners should not have proceeded to send officers to any school. Effectively, what has happened is that their visits have rendered parents, pupils, teachers and staff worried wrecks who are caught in the firing line and, moreover, has left the integrity of those schools up in the air. I just ask that those schools will not be left to the Minister's mercy unless he is kind to them.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the SDLP amendment. I support the amendment because my party's main complaint, which others have echoed, is that the development proposals that have already been announced seem to have been made with indecent haste and in a quite unnecessary manner. Today is 28 November 2011. The Minister has set a target of either Christmas or the end of December for completion of the viability audit of all schools. Surely, if a school had to close as a result of the viability audit or the development proposals that have come from the board,

the closure date would be the same anyway — the end of August 2012.

I appreciate that, a couple of weeks ago in the Adjournment debate on the two Lisburn schools, Lagan Valley MLAs at least had the opportunity to vent their feelings about the procedure being followed and the South Eastern Education and Library Board's determination to press on with its development proposals.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Member for giving way. Is he aware that commissioners who were appointed by a previous Minister are meeting today to discuss those very proposals? Are we aware or has the House been informed of the conclusions of those discussions and possible recommendations to the Minister? I am sure that the Member is aware that Knockmore Primary School takes in quite a number of students from the northern part of South Down.

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

Mr Lunn: I thank Ms Ritchie for her intervention. I am not aware of the decision on either school. I know that today is decision day, certainly for Knockmore Primary School. Indeed, that was to be my next comment. I do not know what the decision will be or, beyond that, how the Minister will react to it. However, I must say that my strong view is that Knockmore Primary School is an excellent school. It satisfies all the viability criteria of which I am aware. I just hope that it will be allowed to continue its good work, particularly in special needs, where, as Ms Ritchie points out, it takes in pupils from areas outside the South Eastern Education and Library Board area.

Therefore, the point of the motion and the very sensible amendment is to express concern at the actions of the board in pressing ahead. It would have been quite in order for it to wait for the outcome of the viability audit, which it knew was coming. I wonder what will happen if the conclusions of the development proposal are different from those of the viability audit. The criteria are slightly different. I hope for the right eventual outcome, particularly for Knockmore Primary School: it is just too good to lose.

I am not familiar with the situation of the two schools in North Down, Redburn Primary School and Ballykeigle Primary School. However, the argument is the same and just as valid. Why anticipate the outcome of the audit? Presumably, schools that fail the viability audit will then be the subject of a development proposal. Why put the cart before the horse? Perhaps, the Minister can explain.

The motion refers to the non-political make-up of the board. That issue has, of course, been kicked around for five years. So much legal advice has been taken on it that the one thing that it has proved is that you can take from legal advice whatever you choose. Advice has been taken by the Education Committee, Lisburn City Council, Castlereagh Borough Council, Down District Council, I believe, and —

Mr McCarthy: Ards.

Mr Lunn: Ards Borough Council, as has just been pointed out. The Department of Education also took advice. We have been inundated with legal opinion. However, the Minister has said that, as far as he is concerned, the South Eastern

Board as it is presently constituted has legal backing and has not been challenged.

The motion, if amended, will leave out the section where the Minister of Education is asked to intervene on this important matter. I presume that we cannot do much about that, but it is still valid, and I want to hear what the Minister's current thinking is. Leaving aside the legality of the situation, the previous Minister's refusal to reinstate the political membership and the current easy excuse that ESA is now imminent and, therefore, there is not much point in reconstituting the board, I believe that it would be a useful gesture for the Minister to proceed with the reinstatement. Whatever point was being made through the previous Minister's refusal to do so is way past its sell-by date now. It is time we had some democratic representation again on that board as on all the other boards. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mrs Hale: I support the motion and the amendment, and I make no apology for using the debate to lobby for Knockmore Primary School and Dunmurry High School in my constituency.

Knockmore and Dunmurry serve the education needs of the community in Lisburn, which is a community that I am proud to represent. Dunmurry High School also caters for children in inner south Belfast. Those children in particular have been knocked back several times and have been victims of school closure after school closure after school closure. The loss of both those schools will have a major impact on the communities that they serve, which provide community hubs where people can mingle and build or reinforce relationships. That, to me, is very important, especially given the sense of community that is alluded to in the CSI document and developed by the American sociologist Robert Putnam.

A community is a family unit, and a local school is part of that unit. The Member for North Down Alex Easton referred to that in his speech. There is, therefore, an onus on the Minister and the South Eastern Board to take those factors into account. I am sure that the Minister will sympathise with many of the points, given his experience of community politics in his constituency of Upper Bann and, indeed, his own educational experience, as I and everyone else in this Chamber do. Community is important now, if not ever more, given the experience of our constituents right across the Province amid the economic crisis. Increasing numbers of people are unemployed, and those in work face job insecurity, pay freezes and possible redundancy.

Knockmore Primary School and Dunmurry High School serve the local and wider communities outside school hours. Knockmore Primary School offers a breakfast club and extra-curricular activities, while local groups use the assembly hall and sports facilities at Dunmurry High School on a regular basis. There is not a moment when either school is not buzzing with enthusiasm or activity, be it when the children are learning during the school day or when local groups use it in the evening.

Schools are as individual as our children, and, while these two school cases differ, they have many similarities. Both schools provide facilities for children statemented with special educational needs, and, as a former teaching assistant, I know the absolute importance of that. The

schools have spent considerable time and money building and augmenting the skills of their staff and their resources to facilitate and provide the best education to their pupils, tailored to each individual education plan, and to build pupil-teacher relationships to facilitate the necessary learning process. The South Eastern Board now seems determined to take all that away and end all that good work, leaving our children upset and confused, their parents dismayed and angry and their teachers possibly without jobs.

The Minister launched a bolstering defence in the House in October when my party colleague Jonathan Craig secured an Adjournment debate on the proposed closure of Dunmurry and Knockmore. As has been referred to by the proposer of the motion, my colleague Alex Easton, I support the comments made by my colleagues and commend and support the motion and the amendment.

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

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Forestry: By-laws

1. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the proposed changes to the forestry by-laws. (AQO 838/11-15)

14. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the position of the new forestry by-laws, particularly in relation to access to forests at night. (AQO 851/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, I will answer questions 1 and 14 together. I wish to see forests used widely for safe and responsible enjoyment. Section 31 of the Forestry Act creates a right for visitors on foot to use most of the Department's forests, subject to rules that are established by the by-laws. Those rules should make clear when the right of access should be suspended, for example when there is an unreasonable risk to the health and safety of the visitor, other visitors or people who work in forests. That right should also be suspended when there is antisocial behaviour, damage to the forests or when officials are obstructed.

The consultation responses pointed in general to a need to adopt less restrictive by-laws and suggested that most visitors behave responsibly in providing for their own safety and their attitude towards other forest users. That is also the Department's broad experience.

After consulting the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I am minded to take a very pragmatic approach. Therefore, I propose to relax the proposed restriction on night-time use by pedestrians to allow the continued use of forest roads and paths after dark. I also intend to permit cycling and other recreational activities to take place over as much forest land as possible, subject to the principles I have outlined. I will provide the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development with a further set of proposed by-laws for final scrutiny early in the new year.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been transferred and question 7 has been withdrawn.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for her reply. Will she confirm that concerns about the impact of the proposed curfew on the use of Northern Ireland's forests after dark are fully taken into account when new forestry by-laws are framed?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I said, I want to take a pragmatic approach. There is no intention to restrict access to the forests. As for the sunset and sunrise aspects of the by-laws, we propose to restrict pedestrian access to forest trails at night, but we think that we have to get the balance right between the freedom to visit our forest land at night and our duty of care to visitors.

I will be very pragmatic. We are not interested in closing off the forests to anybody.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. One of the by-laws states that people may enter forest land only through gateways or other entry points. How will that apply to people entering a forest from open land in areas such as the glens or the Mournes?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Member may be aware, there are many by-laws, and a range of views were expressed on them. It will be a pragmatic approach, so we will relax the restriction so that it will not be an offence to enter a forest other than by a gate. That is a practical and simple way to move forward. It will not be an offence to do that, and I think that that is the best way to move forward.

Mr Frew: I welcome the answer to the previous question. I welcome that common-sense approach. My question relates to the by-laws overall. Their minutiae and detail seem to get to the point where they cannot manage risk because no common sense is applied. What is the Minister's assessment of that? In some places, a by-law states that metal detectors are banned, but the next by-law states that you are not allowed to dig.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is very much about a common-sense and balanced approach. We must make sure that we abide by a duty of care to those using the forests but ensure that they are open so that people can use them. Depending on what area you are talking about, you have to look at every forest in its own right because there will be very different access arrangements for each and different circumstances need to be taken into account. If there is a particular issue about the case you raised about metal detectors, I am happy to look at that.

Mr McDevitt: I was glad to hear the Minister's answer. That is welcome news indeed. Although she is proposing to relax the situation with regard to cycling in forests, will she give a firm commitment to the House that she would be happy with a review with a view to increasing the number of designated mountain biking and cycling routes in our forest parks?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have a meeting in the next few weeks with the International Mountain Bicycling Association. I previously met them informally about how we can work more in partnership. We have a strategy on the social and recreational use of forests. That clearly states that we need to work in partnership if we are to open up our forests for more recreational use. I am actively working on that issue.

Gorse Fires

2. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department plans to take to restore the environmental habitats that were destroyed by gorse fires earlier this year. (AQO 839/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The main habitats that were affected by the gorse fires earlier this year were heathland and forest. The heathland habitat undergoes natural regeneration, so the Department does not plan to take any action to

restore it. Heathland that was damaged by fire has already started to regenerate, and evidence of new growth on the affected ground is being observed by officials. The rate of regeneration depends on the intensity of burns; some areas grow back at different rates.

Forest areas that are owned by the Forest Service and were affected by gorse fires will be replanted with a range of tree species. We also expect some colonisation and regrowth of broadleaf species to take place naturally.

Mrs McKeivitt: Given that the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service faces challenging conditions in the Mournes, as it did last April, what measures has the Minister put in place to protect farmland in the upper and lower Mournes to prevent further gorse fires?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Obviously, it is entirely up to farmers to look after their land. I am happy to look into the issue about the Mournes. It has not been raised with me, but if the Member wants to provide me with more information, I am quite happy to look into that.

Mr Campbell: When the Minister is able to identify areas that have the possibility not only of replanting but of diversifying and trying to get other species that may create productivity in the land that has been destroyed, will she take advantage of that? With whom will she negotiate to do that?

Mrs O'Neill: Again, it is up to individual farmers as to what they do with their land. When it comes to Forest Service land, we can look at all of that in the round. We will look at the type of replanting that we will do. That is within our power, but when it comes to farmers' lands, it is entirely up to them what they decide to replant.

Mr Kinahan: It is good to hear that nature is regenerating where there have been gorse fires. Will the Minister outline any discussions that she has had with the Minister of Justice in relation to the conviction of those found responsible for starting those fires?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have not had any discussions with the Minister of Justice. The way in which the fires started is an issue for the PSNI and the Fire and Rescue Service, and the Department is discussing the issue with those agencies because they are ultimately responsible for deciding how a fire started and what action needs to be taken.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a freagra ar an cheist sin. How much revenue has been lost to the Minister's Department because of gorse fires?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The estimated loss in current revenue is £40,000. That relates to a burnt area of felled timber that had been sold and felled under normal harvesting conditions prior to the fires. The burnt timber was no longer fit for normal sawmill processes and had to be resold into the renewable energy market.

There is also a loss of potential revenue, which mainly relates to areas of young planted trees being burnt. That loss is represented as a reduction in timber valuation on the basis of its calculation complying with international accounting standards.

Bovine Tuberculosis

3. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to eradicate tuberculosis in cattle. (AQO 840/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am pleased that considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved, from nearly 10% in 2002 to just over 5% on 30 September 2011. My aim is to reduce and ultimately eradicate TB in cattle here, and I want to continue working towards that end.

We have a rigorous programme in place for TB eradication. We have achieved EU Commission approval for the programme for 2010-11, and formal approval for the 2012 programme is expected in the near future. That eradication programme is vital in safeguarding our annual £1,000 million-plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry.

EU Commission approval also enables the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to draw down £5 million in co-funding from Europe for 2010 and £4 million in co-funding for 2011. That helps us to offset the proportion of the costs of the programmes that we are carrying forward.

Considerable work has also been undertaken to enhance the TB eradication programme in recent years. We now remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result after a second consecutive TB test rather than after a third, which was the case previously.

We have also improved communications with private veterinary practitioners and have strengthened the supervision process. We have improved DARD's delivery of TB testing through the monitoring of key performance indicators. We also use DNA identity tags on reactors to help reduce reactor-identity queries, substitution fraud and associated disease risks. Although the progress made on TB to date is encouraging, there is clearly a lot more work to be done, as it is a very complex and challenging disease and is difficult to eradicate. There is no simple solution or quick fix.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure that we have well informed, evidence-based strategies to address the issue of cattle-to-cattle spread as well as that in wildlife. We are engaging with the industry and with wider stakeholders to help us to identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for her response. She has spelt out quite a bit in her answer, but does she feel that what she has in place is sufficient and radical enough to continue to reduce TB and eradicate it completely?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As statistics show that we are moving in the right direction, I feel that there is a lot of good work being done by the Department, working with the industry. The things that I set out in my answer as regards what we are doing with respect to the programmes and prevalence studies are obviously helping to bring the figures down. There is not going to be a quick-fix solution. This is going to be a problem that we are going to have for the time ahead, but we are working actively

with all partners to bring the rates down and, hopefully, get to the stage in which we will be free of the disease.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline why she is looking to reduce the amount of compensation payable to farmers whose cattle come down with TB?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There are a number of reasons for that. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the EU Commission brucellosis task force have highlighted that paying 100% compensation for TB and brucellosis does not encourage farmers to take all the steps needed to improve their biosecurity and prevent disease from entering their herds.

The PAC has also commented that at present almost 100% of the cost of animal diseases compensation is borne by the taxpayer. Surely, that is not right and cannot continue. Earlier this year, DARD consulted on introducing table-based valuations for TB and brucellosis reactors and in-contacts. As you know, through your role in the Committee, I reflected on the detail of content of the responses. I corresponded with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on the formal response and had subsequent discussions with its Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson. I decided not to proceed with the table-based valuation system, and that was broadly welcomed by the industry.

The Committee advised that the present compensation arrangements placed the full cost burden on taxpayers and suggested that a cap on compensation could be introduced. I believe that officials have told the Committee that that is how I am going to proceed. I think that it is right and reasonable that, where a cap can be introduced on compensation payments, that should be the case.

A further round of public consultation will end on 2 December. I intend to engage further with the Committee early in 2012 on the way forward.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister explain why, despite the clear benefits to farmers, cattle and the economy, measures to eradicate TB in cattle were not included in the recently published Programme for Government?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for the question. It is a very valid question because people may be concerned about why we have no target for TB when we have one for brucellosis. We are now in a very good position. It is clear that we are in a position to eradicate brucellosis in the period of the draft Programme for Government. That is why it is set out in that document. Although I am also very committed to the eradication of TB, that will not happen in the time frame of the Programme for Government, and that is the very simple reason why it has not been included.

The overall aim of moving to ultimate eradication of TB is what the Department is working towards. There will be a phased approach in a realistic time frame and in the most cost-effective way. We have our TB eradication programme, which has been approved by the EU Commission, and it is vital to safeguard our annual £1,000 million-plus export that depends on livestock. That is a major focus in our industry. We want to move to a position in which we are free from TB, but that will not be in the lifetime of this Programme for Government.

Mr Dallat: The Minister has just told us that there will be no quick fix. The Minister knows better than anyone that, over the years, millions of pounds have been spent on this matter. Does the Minister know where the hotspots are, and is she targeting her resources at those hotspots so that we might at last bring the curse of TB on farms to an end?

2.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Yes, we are very aware of where the disease is prevalent. As I said in my original answer, a number of prevalence studies are being taken forward and a number of scientific issues are being looked at through the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and whatever research partners we have. As I also said, there is no quick fix; if we are to tackle this disease, we will have to do so in the most effective manner. That means that it will take time, but we need to get there, because we need to help our industry to survive.

Mr Allister: When will the Minister put pragmatism before dogma and sentiment and support a badger cull so that we can assist in stopping the transmission of TB from one farm to another?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I have said repeatedly in the Chamber, there are currently no plans for a badger cull. We have to bear in mind that the badger is a protected species. If we look at what has happened in England and Wales, we will see that legal challenges have been made to such a move. So, if we move in that direction, we need to be sure that we can withstand any legal challenge. I will watch with interest to see how things develop in England and in Wales.

We are continuing to work collaboratively. We have a lot of research and programmes going on, and I think that that is how we need to proceed. We also need to be mindful that a badger cull is just one option; vaccination is another that is being explored continually, and I think that we have to continue to look at that.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Flooding: East Belfast

5. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the actions her Department will be taking in East Belfast to alleviate the risk of flooding, as set out in the draft investment strategy. (AQO 842/11-15)

15. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what flood alleviation measures are planned for the East Belfast constituency. (AQO 852/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, I will answer questions 5 and 15 together.

I confirm that the integrated contract for the Greenway environmental scheme and the flood alleviation works is continuing. Although I am disappointed at the rate of progress, I can advise that one major culvert on the Loop river is substantially complete. I remain committed to providing flood alleviation for the people of east Belfast. The draft 10-year investment strategy, which was published in 2008, highlighted Rivers Agency's capital commitment over this period, including flood alleviation works in east Belfast. That commitment has not changed, and Rivers Agency is

now contractually obliged to fund the flood alleviation works element of the integrated Greenway environmental scheme.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is she confident that the funding is in place to deliver the scheme? What specifics are there about how the scheme will be rolled out and monitored, given that it has the potential to alleviate flooding in 1,700 homes in east Belfast?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for the question. As she said, 1,700 homes are affected, and that is the very reason why the scheme is a priority and why the Department is committing to it continually through Rivers Agency. It is a major programme, and, as you know, progress on it has been slow. There have been contractual problems, and Belfast City Council is taking the lead in trying to sort those out. Hopefully, we can get to the stage where things can move on as quickly as possible. However, even if the contract were not to go ahead, the issue would still be a priority for Rivers Agency. Therefore, it would have to find another way to deliver the flood alleviation works. That is my priority in Rivers Agency.

Mr Copeland: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I, too, thank the Minister for her answer. I ask the Minister to cast her mind back to a question that I posed on 18 October about the amount of money that has been set aside in her Department for envisaged expenditure, which is grouped at somewhere around £1 million. Would she care to comment on papers from Belfast City Council that indicate that the total cost that has been envisaged or apportioned with Rivers Agency for the relief of flooding in east Belfast is in the amounts of £7 million to £14 million, with the total estimated cost of the combined Connswater and Greenway flood alleviation scheme being put at £43 million? Could she account for the difference between the £1 million that we know about and the £7 million to £14 million, as well as the £43 million, which are considerably greater?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. The cost of the flood alleviation scheme in its entirety, including the Rivers Agency's contribution, will be £7 million. We have allocated £1 million in this financial year, and I think that I have broken that down in the past to £500,000 and £500,000. As I said, the project remains a priority. It will impact on 1,700 homes, so it obviously remains a priority. As I also said, Belfast City Council is working to resolve the issue, and hopefully that work will come to fruition. If not, I will still see the scheme as a priority, so we will have to move forward by another means to deliver a flood alleviation scheme for the people of east Belfast.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister will know from recent experience in Beragh that, unfortunately, flooding is not confined to rivers in East Belfast. Will she outline what she is doing to address flooding problems elsewhere across the North?

Mrs O'Neill: In light of the flooding — October was a particularly bad month for rainfall — I asked the Department to reprioritise its capital expenditure budget for the next year. As a result, we are able to announce that we have made an additional £1 million available to Rivers Agency for the next financial year in order to help with flood defences in a number of areas such as Beragh. Ballygawley was another area that I was able to look at.

I also want to make it very clear that I am continuing to bid for further funds from the Executive for flood alleviation measures. I have asked for a paper to be drawn up that I will bring to the Executive just to re-emphasise the dangers of the lack of flood alleviation and to ask for Executive support for additional funds for those measures. I have also asked for an urgent review of the Rivers Agency's response to the October flooding. Pat Doherty took that inquiry forward and is due to report on its outcome this week.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response, and I welcome that it has been broadened out to refer to flood alleviation measures right across the North. The Minister recently visited the site of 143 Glen Road, Maghera. Will she provide some detail on what her Department is going to do about the flooding and serious measures that face that family?

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of the pressures facing that family. I visited the site and saw for myself how their back garden was washed into the watercourse. Rivers Agency has visited the site and done some remedial works to shore up the banks so that there is no further slippage. I will continue to work with the householders to ensure that we get the best response, because the problem is that that watercourse is not designated. That is the issue that we are dealing with, but, as I said, Rivers Agency has shored up the back of the house, which will hopefully give a wee bit of stability until more major works can be completed.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. I noticed that her previous response referenced an address in Maghera. I believe that I read — although I stand to be corrected — that that river was not designated. As we are turning this into a constituency-wide question on flooding, I will ask about the many instances of flooding on the Grange Road outside Parkgate, where the river is designated. Will the Minister assure me that she will do everything to keep her contractors on that site until all the works are carried out as opposed to their working in places that have not been designated?

Mr Speaker: It is wonderful how we have moved from east Belfast around the country. It is wonderful. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs O'Neill: If the Member would like to contact me outside of Question Time, I will be happy to explore the Grange Road issue.

Egg Producers

6. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the EU ban on eggs produced in battery cage systems, what actions she has taken to protect those producers who have made investments in order to comply but who will have to compete with member states where producers have not invested. (AQO 843/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I welcome the fact that a significant majority of producers here are already in a position to comply with the welfare of laying hens directive when it comes into force on 1 January. I have made it clear that I want to protect compliant producers here from the risk of being put at a competitive disadvantage to producers from other member states that do not comply with the directive. Illegal production could adversely affect economic stability

and fairness within a sector that is very important to our economy.

I have worked closely with Ministers from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the other devolved Administrations and Ministers in the South regarding the implementation and enforcement of the laying hens directive. We have pressed the Commission to agree a way forward on enforcing the new rules that will protect our compliant producers from competitive disadvantage. The Commission has also proposed a gentleman's agreement that would give non-compliant producers longer to comply; would allow eggs from illegal cages to be processed only in the originating member state; and would also require an action plan to be produced by that member state to show how they are going to reach full compliance. However, to date, no agreement has been reached on how to properly enforce the directive.

I have made it clear that I want any proposal brought forward by the Commission to have guarantees and safeguards built in and any legislative amendments to be brought forward by the Commission as a matter of urgency. The directive will be discussed at a Committee of Experts meeting in Brussels tomorrow, and we await the outcome of that. It will be discussed again at the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 15 December, at which I will be present. We will hopefully have a way forward at that stage.

Mr Storey: Thank you, Mr Speaker; be assured that you will end up in North Antrim as a result of the tour of the constituencies that seems to be going on.

I thank the Minister for the information that she has given, but I am concerned that we are basing a very serious situation for local producers simply on a gentleman's agreement and that we have no agreement in place on how we will police the issue. Will the Minister assure the House that a clear line will be taken not to have our local producers put at a disadvantage as a result of around 50 million eggs that could possibly come into Northern Ireland from producers who have not complied with the directive that comes into force on 1 January next year?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. That is what we have been actively working towards. I raised the point with the Commission that we felt that the gentleman's agreement was not strong enough. How do you enforce a gentleman's agreement? We wanted clear action to be able to be taken so that we did not put any of our producers at a disadvantage. A number of member states such as Sweden, Austria, Germany and Luxembourg are already compliant, but a number of countries are not. We need to be mindful of that and make sure that we do not put our local industry at any sort of disadvantage. That is what we are actively doing with the Commission.

Mrs D Kelly: I share Mr Storey's concerns about the gentleman's agreement. Will the Minister give us an indication of any discussions she has had on food labelling and the labelling of the eggs with their country of origin to ensure that the competitive edge here is protected?

Mrs O'Neill: A number of issues are being considered by the Commission and the technical expert committee. One issue was around labelling and one was around UV lights so that you could see exactly where the eggs came from. There are

a number of different things that are being explored, and that is just one of them.

Mr McMullan: Will the Minister outline what specific actions are being taken to protect poultry producers here from non-compliant imports come 1 January 2012?

Mrs O'Neill: As I have said in previous answers, my position is very clear. We need to be very strong and work to protect our local producers against those who are not compliant and any eggs coming in from member states that are not compliant. The gentleman's agreement seems to be the way in which the Commission is moving, and we need to be mindful of that. I will continue my discussions with the Commission after the meeting tomorrow, and when I am in Brussels on 15 December.

Mr Allister: The Minister congratulates local farmers who have put themselves at great expense to be compliant. Does she acknowledge that it is no thanks to her Department that they have put themselves in that position? Not one penny of assistance was given to the poultry sector in that regard, and now they find themselves in a position where they have complied and have done what was asked, but it seems that around 50% of other member states have not bothered. Can the Minister assure us that there will be strong and relentless action to bring some equity to the situation?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. My predecessor Michelle Gildernew worked very closely with the industry and looked at all of the available options for funding. She looked at the rural development programme and how we could support the sector to modernise. Funding was made available to the poultry sector under tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme. That included plant machinery and equipment. That was all part of the funding scheme that was taken forward at that time, and many in the poultry sector got involved in that. As for making sure that we do not disadvantage our local producers, I have answered that clearly in reply to previous supplementary questions. We want to make sure that we protect our industry and that we are not put at any disadvantage because of non-compliant eggs coming in.

Mr Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Health and Social Care: Rural Areas

8. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she met with the chief executive of the Health and Social Care Board to discuss how he has ensured the needs of people living in rural areas will be considered in his review of health and social care. (AQO 845/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not discussed that issue directly with the chief executive of the Health and Social Care Board. However, I have been working closely with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the development of the rural White Paper action plan to ensure that the needs of rural communities are taken into account when it comes to planning and delivery of health and social care services. I have also asked my officials to make contact with the health and social care team that is carrying out the review to discuss some of the more specific challenges that rural dwellers can face.

Mr Speaker: I will allow the Member a quick supplementary question.

Mr McGimpsey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer. What does she consider the key criteria and priorities to address the particular needs of people living in rural areas?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have spoken to the Member on many occasions during his tenure as Minister of Health in relation to rural aspects of healthcare. One of the biggest challenges in rural areas is equal access to healthcare. That continues to be one of the main issues, as does travel time to hospitals. Those are all relevant issues. If you live in Pomeroy or somewhere else in my constituency of Mid Ulster, you might have to travel for over an hour to get to a service. That is one of the major challenges that we need to look at when it comes to addressing the needs of the rural community.

3.00 pm

Environment

Planning: Renewable Energy

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department will improve the planning process for renewable energy project applications. (AQO 853/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank Mr Lunn for his question. I also thank other Members for the wave of similar questions tabled for this Question Time. Renewables and renewable technology is arguably Northern Ireland's single biggest economic opportunity. When I say that, I am only paraphrasing John Swinney, who said that renewables and renewable technology is Scotland's single biggest economic opportunity. I very much appreciate the question, as it allows me to record and emphasise our opportunities for R&D, technology and renewable energy; our opportunities to become self-sufficient on this island through use of renewable energy; and our opportunities to export to the European grid.

I also welcome the challenge behind the question; namely, when it comes to major renewable planning applications, there has been slippage over the last period in ensuring that performance targets were met. How do I address that? First, a working group made up of people in the renewable industry and officials is looking at how we can maximise the planning system to produce positive outcomes. Secondly, I will be doing the same before Christmas with anaerobic digesters, for which a significant number of applications are now in the system. Thirdly, we are interrogating timelines generally to ensure that we turn those groups' findings around as quickly as possible. Fourthly, we have identified more applications across the range of planning applications that could, with council approval, go for streamlining quickly to ensure that up to 75% of all our planning applications are dealt with in that manner. In that way and in other ways, I hope that we will be able to answer affirmatively the question of how the Department will improve the planning process for renewable projects.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware, because he has recently answered my colleague's question, that the Department is processing 861 planning applications relating to renewable energy development and that the median time for a decision is 24 weeks, which presumably means that many decisions take a lot longer than 24 weeks. I am encouraged by what he said. Has he given any consideration to the imposition of a deadline, similar to what pertains in the Republic of Ireland?

Mr Attwood: I welcome the supplementary question. Mr Lunn is quite correct. At present, 50% of the major planning applications for renewables are managed within the performance timeline. However, I admit that that is not good enough. The performance target is 60%, and we should even be stretching ourselves to exceed 60%. That having been said, over the past two years, 115 wind turbine applications and 16 wind farm applications have been approved. Therefore, there is good form in the planning system, both in respect of local wind turbines and the much larger wind farms. However, we could do more. We are currently drawing up plans to require a statutory timeline — under law — for statutory consultees to reply to consultation. If they do not, they will be deemed to have made no comment and offered no objection.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister recognise that there is a grid-connection window in which a project has the ability to connect and that, as such, there is a very short time frame in which a project can become viable, the loan offer is available and the grid connection is possible? Will the Minister ensure that a decision on all projects will be made within a much shorter period?

Mr Attwood: I accept that point. This is clearly an issue that moves somewhat beyond my competence, given that it deals with energy companies and the national grid. However, the point is valid nonetheless. The sooner that we can turn around the applications, the greater the opportunity that local people will have to access the grid, the greater the opportunity that they will have to make a financial return over and above their own electricity needs, and so on and so forth. Therefore, I take that point. The point that the Member makes is particularly relevant, given the change in environment around financial assistance to renewable energies that may yet be visited on the North of Ireland and Britain.

Mr Frew: Given the Minister's statement about Scotland being an area of best practice and looking to it with regard to renewable energies, does he agree that as planning applications for major wind farms increase and come towards areas of population, maybe we need to assess our current regulations around wind farm applications, tighten up the criteria and become more specific, like Scotland?

Mr Attwood: The quality of wind, wave and tide that we have in this part of the world, not least because the island of Ireland is Atlantic facing, confirms why we have such an arguably unique economic opportunity in Europe to maximise these opportunities.

The British-Irish Council meeting was cancelled today due to the death of the Taoiseach's mother, and I pass on my condolences to the Kenny family. One of the Council's major pieces of work is how it represents all the various jurisdictions that make up the body and how it can exploit economic opportunities around renewables. Therefore, there

are things that we can learn from Scotland. For example, its peatlands guidance is more flexible than ours when it comes to wind farms and wind turbines, and my Department is looking at the guidance to see whether we can learn from Scotland and introduce some useful flexibility into our guidance.

I accept the sentiment behind the Member's question. As applications begin to roll out, it is clear that local concerns, opposition and resistance are gathering pace and, if we can learn from best practice in other jurisdictions, we should do so.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister, particularly for his reference to the Scottish Finance Minister's support for renewable energy. It is a shame that our Finance Minister will not follow suit. What is being done to ensure that PPS 18 is still in line with the most recent technology? In my constituency, an application for three wind turbines was turned down on the basis of noise, despite planning authorities acknowledging that they were the quietest turbines on the market.

Mr Attwood: I note his comments in respect of John Swinney. If the man does not blush too much, in my view, he is the Minister on these islands who most understands the difference between being in government and being in power, and we could all learn from him.

I do not think you should ask a politician a scientific question because I do not have a scientific answer. However, the point is valid. As renewable technology advances and might mitigate risks around noise, nuisance, disturbance, impact on local houses, and all the rest, we might need to revisit the guidance that we give in respect of wind farms and wind turbines. I do not have a scientific answer today, but I will return to the matter subsequently.

Single-use Carrier Bags

2. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of the Environment how much money he anticipates his Department would generate on an annual basis from the single-use carrier bag levy. (AQO 854/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I have indicated on previous occasions, it is anticipated in the Budget that up to £4 million per year might be generated through a single-use carrier bag levy. However, that is dependent on my judgement, further to the recently concluded consultation, about what is the right cost for single-use carrier bags when the proposal goes live, as we hope it will in 2013. During a previous Question Time, I put down a note of caution: unless the legislation in respect of carrier bags is extended to include reusable carrier bags, the revenue generated from the single-use carrier bag levy may be much less than the £4 million that was anticipated. That is why I welcome the fact that, since that previous Question Time, the Executive have endorsed my proposal to bring forward legislation to the Floor to extend the current legislation in respect of carrier bags to include reusable carrier bags. That will close the gap, secure the revenue that we might expect from this levy and, more particularly, secure the environmental benefits that are to be gained from reducing the number of carrier bags in use.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can the Minister inform the House how the tax — if he does, indeed, bring it forward — will be collected, who will collect it, the

cost of the administration of the collection and how his Department will be able to know how many bags retailers are handing out?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. Those are matters that occupy my mind at the moment. The simple model of collection would be for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to collect it on behalf of the Northern Ireland Government. It does so in respect of all other taxes, including VAT at the point of sale. It seems to me that that is the right model going forward. That model would mitigate the bureaucracy, expense and upfront costs of introducing the levy on single-use carrier bag users. So far, however, HMRC has declined that offer. However, I welcome the fact that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has, again, written to Treasury to ask it to further consider putting into its IT systems a mechanism whereby the levy would be collected by Treasury.

I hope that Treasury will accept that proposal, because the alternative, be it an in-house or out-of-house model, is likely to be more expensive and more bureaucratic and to reduce the income that would come to our exchequer, if you like, from the single-use bag levy. Perhaps, that is what is behind the Member's question. I hope that HMRC will recognise that tax affairs in respect of Britain and Northern Ireland are changing and that devolved Administrations may look for flexibilities when it comes to tax issues in the future, and that it will use this intervention as a model of adjusting its financial and tax collecting mechanisms in a way that helps devolved Administrations going forward.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer and for the fact that the proposal has been included and timetabled in the draft Programme for Government. Will the Minister outline what savings retailers, especially small shopkeepers, will make from not having to buy thousands and thousands of bags every year? What consideration has been given to exemptions for fresh food producers, such as butchers, fishmongers etc?

Mr Attwood: I welcome that question. I confirm that the matter is in the Programme for Government and, as I said, the Executive have endorsed the principle that legislation should be extended to reusable bags. As I indicated to Mr McKay's colleague during a previous Question Time, what bags might be exempted is a matter that is still under consideration. The consultation around all this has only just concluded. The consultation responses are being assessed by the Department, and I am still looking at what the full outworkings and operation of the scheme might be.

As I indicated on a previous occasion, it seems valid to me, in principle, that, when butchers put meat into plastic bags, that should not be covered by the levy. Similarly, when pharmacists and chemists put medicines into brown paper bags, that might not be covered by the proposed legislation. In any case, we know what we mean. The vast number of bags that would be subject to the levy is the vast number of bags that are used in the multiple supermarkets around the North of Ireland. That is where the main focus and attention of the levy will be. In the fullness of time, when all the consultation is worked through and the details are fine-tuned, that will be confirmed.

Ms Lo: Will the proposed further legislation to include reusable bags delay any further the process of starting the levy?

3.15 pm

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that question. The answer is no. I explained to my Executive colleagues that, given that the will of the Assembly was to have a single bag levy and that it was put into the Budget as a revenue stream for the Department of the Environment by 2013, whatever the issues in the initial legislation may be, they were not sufficient cause to delay the implementation of the initial legislation. Consequently, we have a two-phased approach. We will honour the original timeline to have the legislation in place by April 2013 and, in parallel with that, we will bring forward new legislation for reusable bags. Therefore, any levy in respect of reusable bags will go live a year after the levy for single use bags.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Planning: Training for Councillors

4. **Mr Murphy** asked the Minister of the Environment what training will be provided for councillors to enable them to take on extra responsibilities in relation to planning applications. (AQO 856/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I welcome this question, as I have touched on the matter on a number of occasions. It will be a significant political, practical and culture change when local councils assume responsibility for categories of planning application under the review of public administration (RPA). When John Swinney, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance in Scotland, was responsible for local government, he said that the difficulty of managing the change of local councils becoming the local authority responsible for planning decisions was not straightforward or easy. Therefore, in the run-up to RPA, the need to create the right architecture in local councils, the right skills base, the right personnel and human resource capacity, as well as councillors having the skills and wherewithal to operate as a planning authority, as opposed to the legitimate function of acting as planning lobbyists, will be very important.

In taking that forward, we will undertake a number of initiatives. There will be pilots to test, in advance of the transfer, how a local council would act as a local planning authority. We will give local councils best models of practice as to how that might look. The local council and the local planning office will become more intimate with regard to their day-to-day working and relationships so as to build up understanding and capacity. The local government training group will undertake particular tasks to train local councillors and try to narrow the difference between the risk of councils not fulfilling the full role of a planning authority and continuing in their old role of planning lobbyists.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for the assurance on training. He knows that, as well as passing the power down to local government, moving from a land-based planning system to a spatial planning system will require considerable change. Obviously, training and establishing that new culture is very important. Does the Minister agree that to get some certainty around the

actual make-up of the new local government structures, the number of councils that we will have will also assist greatly in councillors' understanding the area that they will be covering, and that we should get the training rolled out as quickly as possible so that we can transfer those powers, along with all of the other powers, to local government as quickly as we possibly can?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I acknowledge the first point that he made. It is very important that, as planning goes forward in the North of Ireland, it becomes more and more a plan-based planning system rather than a reactive one. There are very few plans now in place across the North that define how areas, localities, cities and towns should develop. That is why the Executive agreed in principle that I should bring forward a planning reform Bill that will see some of the planning reforms that were intended to come into force after local government reorganisation being brought forward earlier, and that includes development plans. Therefore, I welcome that.

In respect of the wider political question, the Assembly, the Executive and I as Minister need to judge ourselves against what is good government and best outcomes. That is the standard against which all public policy decisions that are made by government and Ministers should be judged.

That being the case, and when local councils have come forward in the past two or three months with proposals for making potential savings of up to £600 million of savings over 25 years, I think that it is reasonable for me to ask my Executive colleagues and others whether that would create the flexibility to move from an 11-council model to a 15-council model. The 15-council model would create further savings with less disruption, six councils would go unchanged, and there would be reduced upfront costs and reduced severance schemes for highly paid chief executives. It would also recognise and acknowledge local identities and loyalties much better than the 11-council model, and I think that that is a reasonable question to ask. Given that it is a reasonable question, and mindful of the decision that the Executive have taken, I hope that, even at this eleventh hour, people will think again.

Mr Weir: When will the Minister move ahead with the 11-council model? He also referred to pilot schemes, and it is clear that that will create one of the greatest cultural changes in local government. What is his timescale for the initiation of those pilot schemes? Given the different approaches to planning in urban and rural areas, will those pilot schemes cover different types of planning scenarios in urban and rural areas?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. We need to create certainty and avoid doubt about the reorganisation of local government, and I can confirm that I will be moving forward with RPA. I just hope that it is in the image of what I want, rather than in the image of what the Executive want. However, I appreciate and acknowledge the will of the Executive to date.

Mr Weir, only a short while ago, your party opposed a Bill that was tabled by Dawn Purvis, then an MLA for East Belfast, to stop double-jobbing. Yet, six months later, the DUP Ministers in the Executive endorsed my proposal to end that practice. When that Bill was debated, you, Mr Weir, proposed an amendment that suggested that allowances to

MLAs who are councillors should be cut. However, a matter of weeks ago, when I made exactly the same proposal, one of your party colleagues, Lord Morrow, went on the radio and showed disregard for a proposal that I made and that you had proposed only a matter of months before. It seems to be a strange world — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr Attwood: What that demonstrates is that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr Attwood: What that demonstrates is that, as our maturity grows and as our wisdom deepens, good government and good argument can prevail. If that is the judgement against which RPA should be assessed, I think that there are still opportunities to get RPA right.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware that, in the past, posts of responsibility were handed out to blue-eyed boys irrespective of their ability to carry out those additional duties. Can the Minister assure the House — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Dallat: Can the Minister assure the House that, under the new 15-council model, members will be given the extra capacity training and will honestly earn the additional money that they may receive? That is not what happened in all cases in the past.

Mr Attwood: The last time that I looked, my eyes were green or brown. *[Interruption.]* It is only Margaret Ritchie who thinks that I am the blue-eyed boy. *[Laughter.]*

A Member: It should be Alasdair that you are worried about.

Mr Attwood: Let us not go there. *[Laughter.]* Of course, my wife and children also think that I am a blue-eyed boy.

The point behind the Member's questions is very relevant. Even since the May council elections, we have seen the legacy of the past in the attitudes of one or two councillors in one or two council areas. We have seen that evidence, and the consequence is that, when it comes to RPA, whatever the final model is — I am mindful and respectful of the Executive's decision in that regard — we need to demonstrate that the conduct of councillors is judged against all of the highest standards of a code of ethics when it comes to the protection of minorities, governance arrangements, proportionality across the range of council and committee positions and, crucially, the procurement of services. Too many councils in the North continue to have practices that may be valid but, in my view, do not comply with best procurement practice. That is why, in working with the council and council leaderships — political and managerial — we will drive down costs through the improvement, collaboration and efficiency programme while ensuring best compliance when it comes to procurement.

Planning: Renewable Energy

Mr Speaker: The next question on the list is from Mr McGimpsey.

Mr McGimpsey: Question 6.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question, which is —

Some Members: Question 5.

Mr Attwood: — question 5. Yes, I was wondering.

5. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current timescale for dealing with planning applications for renewable energy projects. (AQO 857/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I refer to my previous answers in this regard. There are currently 860 renewable energy planning applications. As I indicated, for the major ones, there has been slippage from the turnover target of 60% in 23 weeks to a situation where we now have only 50% being turned over. As I said in my previous answer, in an effort to rectify that situation, a range of interventions is available on wind turbines, wind farms and anaerobic digesters.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for his answer. How do we assess renewable energy projects as minor or major applications? Clearly, the process for major applications is much slower than it is for minor ones. Is there room for reassessing that guidance to perhaps speed up the whole process?

Mr Attwood: As I indicated, given the issues, if not concerns, that have been raised by people in the front line of renewable technology and their applications, I have established two groups. One of those groups is on renewables, in particular wind energy, and it is where the industry meets the Department to identify any and all opportunities to ensure that the processing of such applications is different. For example, there are cases — this has become relevant in south Down — in which it seems that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is asking for environmental impact assessments in respect of applications that simply do not require one. That applies more to wind turbines than wind farms, because wind farms clearly have EIA implications.

Similarly, as we go forward with anaerobic digesters, there are 60 applications in the system at the moment, but very few approvals. This is clearly going to be part and parcel of the planning and renewable system going forward over the next number of years. That is why I have established a group that will meet before Christmas to interrogate all of that. We tried to put in place, to date not always successfully, service level agreements with the NIEA, the Department for Regional Development, Geological Survey and Northern Ireland Water to ensure the proper management and handling of applications that come back to the Department. As I indicated, it seems that there is a category of renewable applications that should be dealt with by a streamlined mechanism in local councils rather than through a strategic projects division in headquarters.

Mr A Maginness: I am supportive of the Minister in his enthusiastic support for renewable energy and the development of that industry here in Northern Ireland.

We are playing catch-up in many respects. Can the Minister suggest any further steps that can be taken to improve the efficiency of the planning process?

3.30 pm

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I acknowledge that the planning system and planning officials, especially those in the strategic division in Belfast and in quite a number of the divisional planning offices (DPOs), have developed good knowledge and capacity going forward, but it is clear that that needs to be rolled out across the North of Ireland. That is why, in respect of individual wind turbine applications, training that has been developed in the north-west, in Derry and Strabane, is going to be applied equally in DPOs across the North of Ireland.

Behind all that, however, there is a deeply strategic question. Are we in government going to put ourselves, especially the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest Northern Ireland, in a much better place to draw down from Europe the billions of euros in opportunities that exist through the European Investment Fund and R&D and technology funds? FP7 is a €50 billion fund, and its successor programme for 2014-20 is an €80 billion fund. The drawdown from that fund, including on the renewables side, where there is a very significant stream of environmental funding, has been marginal, to put it mildly. If we are going to exploit the renewable energy and technology opportunities, and the example of what has been happening in Harland and Wolff over the past week, we need to put ourselves in a much better place when it comes to accessing European funds, which are the single biggest source of R&D funds available to member countries.

Private Members' Business

School Closures: South Eastern Education and Library Board

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the school closures announced within the South Eastern Education and Library Board area to date; is concerned that the board is making these decisions ahead of the outcome of the review of schools being conducted by the Department of Education; is further concerned that, unlike all other education and library boards, this board is run by commissioners with no political input; and calls on the Minister of Education to intervene on this important matter. — [Mr Easton.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Minister of Education" and insert

"to postpone any decisions until the viability audit has been completed." — [Mr McDevitt.]

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I confirm what my colleague Daithí McKay said earlier. We will not support the motion or the amendment. Obviously, the primary reason for that is very simply that an appropriate process is well under way in relation to the matter in hand. As we speak, as I understand it, there are no formal proposals to close any school in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for giving way. Just to update the Member: an announcement is being made with regard to the closure of three schools in the South Eastern area as we speak. Only one has been reprieved, which is Knockmore Primary School, and I warmly welcome that.

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

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member for that information. Perhaps I should rephrase my point. To my knowledge, no decision has yet been formally taken to close any particular school. Indeed, where proposals are coming forward, they will result in development proposals. Of course, at that point, the Department and the Minister will enter the process to look at the problems relating to specific schools and, more importantly, the potential solutions. I am mindful of the Minister's recent statement to the House, in late September, in which he made clear his and the Department's intention to move forward with a clear focus on the needs of the children.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. As a member of Ards Borough Council, I have seen a closure notice for Ballykeigle Primary School come to that council for consultation. That was long before the Minister had even suggested that there should be a complete audit. That school is on the closure list. Detrimental things have happened already; the principal has gone, the rot has set in, and it is too late, unfortunately.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member for his intervention. Again, I do not want to rehearse the arguments. The proposals that the Minister outlined are not new; the

determination was made on behalf of the Minister and the Department to move ahead appropriately to deal with problem areas, such as the future viability of a school, and very clear criteria and terms of reference were set down for that.

I am confident that the Minister and the Department have at the forefront of their minds the need to ensure that there is a viable schools and education system for the future that allows all children to achieve to the best of their abilities.

As I said, when the SEELB's full proposals come forward, they will, obviously, contain recommendations. At that point, the Minister, the Department and others will have a proper opportunity to evaluate, based on a professional assessment, the difficulties that particular schools may face. The Minister has made a very clear statement to the House. The difficulty for the Minister is that, on one occasion, he is told to delay taking action and, on another, he is told to make interventions speedily. That is no way to proceed towards providing a sustainable schools base for children.

It is important that schools know where they stand. I certainly understand the anxiety that exists at this time among parents in particular and everyone in the education sector as we move into even more difficult budgetary circumstances. By the same token, however, it is up to all of us to avoid simply focusing on one school at a time. To do so is regrettable. The situation requires all of us to work together to ensure that each and every child who goes through the education system has the best opportunity to attain for themselves a better outcome than that of many children who leave school at present. We have all accepted that. We need to do much better on our children's behalf. We all understand that that needs to be done on a more rationalised basis, with children at the forefront of the minds of the Department, the Minister and, presumably, everyone in the Chamber.

We are all constituency representatives, so it is understandable that we are keen to ensure that we get the best results for schools in our constituencies. However, I urge Members not to jump in. We need to be able to stand back a little bit and ensure that we are clear that, when we talk about a school, we understand that there is a clear rationale against which any school can be assessed and that the terms of reference of that rationale produce the matrix by which we look at how to develop the school to its best potential. Obviously, factors such as enrolment, quality of education and financial viability will all come into play.

We all have to look forward and provide the type of leadership that Daithí McKay referred to earlier. As I said, we are all prone to focusing on our own constituencies and to difficulties that we all have to face in the time ahead, whether they relate to education, health or any other service. This debate is about education. Let us wait until development proposals are made in respect of schools.

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

Mr A Maskey: Let us give our full support to the Department and the Minister to ensure that we deliver the best education system in all schools for all children.

Mr Weir: I support the motion and the amendment. I am not sure whether I should declare an interest. I was a member of the South Eastern Board that was formally suspended in 2006. I am not sure whether I have been officially decommissioned. I am not sure that any of us who have been in that position —

Mr Dallat: Have you got photographs?

Mr Weir: I do not, actually. If I were to provide photographic evidence, I do not think that it would take us very much further forward.

Everybody accepts that there will be changes to the school estate. At times, it is argued that not every school will survive. Perhaps, at times, we get too attached to particular bits of bricks and mortar. However, I must say that the approach that has been taken by the South Eastern Board is totally unacceptable. I share and concur with earlier remarks, which I will not dwell on, about the undemocratic nature of the South Eastern Board and the failure to plug that gap for more than five and a half years. The issue is about process and making the right decision. It says a lot and demonstrates the arrogant attitude of the board that, on the very day that we debate a motion, which, if it is amended, calls for that process to be put on ice until the audit takes place as part of proper process — it is clear from responses around the Chamber that the motion and amendment will be passed — the board still met in defiance of that. It did not postpone its meeting. It went ahead and made decisions irrespective of what the Assembly says. That is testament to the South Eastern Board's aloof attitude.

In the process, no one connected to the schools — I have a particular connection with the one in my constituency — is asking for special favours. I agree with Mr Maskey: we should not treat this one school at a time. That is the very purpose of the motion. It should not be a situation in which one board moves on some sort of solo run in departure from the rest of it. Indeed, if we are to have an audit that looks at the global needs of Northern Ireland and at hundreds of schools throughout Northern Ireland, one school should not be treated differently. Indeed, four schools should not be treated differently. That is the whole point of this.

The argument that a development proposal has not been produced seems to be a fairly weak one. If it walks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, I will think that it is a duck. In this case, a proposal to close the four schools was put to the schools and is now being proposed again today at the board. Yes, there may well be formal processes beyond that, but let us not pretend that this is not having an impact on those schools and, indeed, moving ahead towards development proposals. Therefore, all we are saying is that all the schools throughout Northern Ireland should be put on a level playing field. We should not be taking premature decisions in one area that will detrimentally affect those schools. Indeed, we need to look at this holistically as part of the audit.

I am not convinced that what is being done with Redburn is the right decision. Everyone would accept that there needs to be changes to the school system in Hollywood, but we have a proposal on the table that is awaiting capital funding for a four-school scheme involving the amalgamation of Redburn and Hollywood Primary School, of Priory and

Hollywood Nursery School. That involves two different sectors, three different age groups and four schools.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that the plan that he has just outlined is beneficial because it is exactly that — planned — whereas the proposal to close Redburn at the end of this academic year means that there will be an effective amalgamation of Hollywood Primary School and Redburn but not a planned amalgamation and, therefore, will not be an ordinary transition?

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

Mr Weir: I agree with the Member that it needs to be planned. Indeed, what has been put forward for the four schools should be a model for the way forward for Northern Ireland. It is, effectively, shared education, it is multidimensional and includes three age sectors, yet the problem with the proposal is that it short-circuits this. It is not planned; it jumps the gun. Indeed, rather than moving ahead on a planned basis, this may, as the Member indicates, lead to a situation in which people simply move with their feet to Hollywood Primary School. It has led to a situation in which various other schools have already moved to try to poach students from there, and, indeed, rather than an ordered situation of amalgamation between the schools, there are flyers and requests from other schools to try to pick the bones of Redburn out, with the end result that we may not get the proper organised and planned way forward for Hollywood that is to the benefit of all. It is not only ill-timed; it is ill-judged.

I appeal to the Minister and his party to think again. In many ways, this runs contrary to the spirit of the audit. The audit should treat everywhere holistically, but this is picking off what appear to be the weakest parts of the pack and going for those first. That is wholly unacceptable. We have seen the arrogant response of the South Eastern Board, and the line of thought that it is determined to take is clear. I appeal to the Minister to, through his closing remarks, ensure that the three schools that appear to have been singled out today —

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

Mr Weir: — are not treated simply as cannon fodder but are treated properly and to ensure that any decision by the Department is put on hold until we have the full audit and a proper plan.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Nesbitt: I am very pleased to say a few words on this debate. I support the motion and the amendment and thank all those who brought them to the House. I am passionate about education and, indeed, in my own little life, my career path would not be what it was had it not been for the attention that my parents and teachers paid to my education. As that career path has brought me to this House, I know that some Members will feel that there is a downside to a decent education after all.

There is a concern that some schools in this education area may suffer because two parallel processes are in play. One is the viability audit that is being conducted on a regional level by the Department of Education, and another is a subregional process that is being conducted

by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. I have a further concern, which has already been articulated by my colleague Mr McNarry, that the South Eastern Education and Library Board is still being run by commissioners, given that the problem emerged on 6 July 2006. The longevity and competence of the commissioners remains in question, and there is a real danger that the schools may suffer from the two processes. If the schools suffer, the children and the families will also suffer.

3.45 pm

I have a particular interest in Ballykeigle Primary School and, more generally, rural primary schools with regard to the viability audit, which is the regional process. As I understand it, there are three criteria: entrance, achievement and financial viability, none of which takes into account the importance of rural communities. A rural school can be looked on not only as a place of learning but as some form of community hub. The answer may not always be to condemn a school as failing but to use it as an opportunity to refashion and redesign what the school achieves. I am thinking, for example, of what the extended schools programme can do for families. It is an opportunity to achieve other goals through the school estate and to look at what the school estate might do to improve general health, adult literacy and numeracy and, particularly with regard to rural communities, social cohesion. There are fewer and fewer opportunities for people who live in rural areas to stop and socially interact. If you remove rural primary schools, you take away a fantastic opportunity to embed social cohesion.

As well as those concerns, I want to mention the sixth-largest controlled post-primary school in the education and library board area, Movilla High School. That school has requested to reduce temporarily its enrolment numbers from 900 to 600 and, correspondingly, reduce its annual admission number from 180 to 120. The reason is that there has been a 10-year fall in numbers, and, in fact, the enrolment figure of 900 and the admission figure of 180 have never been achieved by Movilla on census day.

Last year, by closing down part of the main school building, Movilla achieved savings of £100,000 over the year. On that basis, it has asked the Department whether it can, temporarily, reduce those figures. In September of this year, the Minister sent me a response to a question for written answer. He said:

"My Department received a letter from the South Eastern Education and Library Board ... supporting Movilla High School in a request that their admission and enrolment numbers be temporarily reduced."

Despite that support, the decision is currently under consideration. It is still under consideration today, and I want to use this occasion to lobby the Minister and ask him whether he will ensure a speedy resolution to ensure that Movilla High School can plan with some certainty for its future. As with many schools, it is reeling from the fact that it will lose £100 a pupil in the forthcoming financial year. For Movilla High School, that means a budgetary hole of some £45,000 next year. Certainty is being sought, and I urge the Minister to give that consideration. I support the motion as amended.

Mr Craig: It gives me very little pleasure to speak on this issue, especially given the news that I received earlier about

the three schools that have been put into formal proposals with regard to closure: Dunmurry High School, Ballykeigle Primary School and Redburn Primary School. As was pointed out earlier, it is a slap in the teeth to the Assembly to have those decisions taken while we are in the middle of debating whether they have followed proper procedures.

With regard to the process that has been used, consultation took place, and the first school on which it took place was Dunmurry High School.

The entire process is a self-fulfilling prophecy. First, the issue of whether the school should close is consulted on. The consultation is not on whether the school should be reformed; on whether there should be intervention to change the way in which the school is run; or on whether there should be an amalgamation with any other school in the locality. No, the South Eastern Education and Library Board's proposals were specific and clear: it was consulting on whether the schools should close or not.

In saying that, however, the board first consults with the board of governors. It then consults with the teachers, which is done in private. Lo and behold, the next phase is to go to a public meeting with the parents of children in those schools. If there is one thing that I have learnt in life, it is that if you broadcast the fact that you are looking at whether you should close something, the inevitable will eventually happen.

I do not blame any parents at that public meeting in Dunmurry High School for looking after the future education of their children. If the board is saying that it will close an education establishment and your child is sitting there ready to do his or her exams this year or next, you will inevitably put the education of your child first and remove him or her from the school. That becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for those schools.

That is the process that the South Eastern Education and Library Board entered into for all those schools, with the exception of one: Knockmore Primary School. Parents started voting with their feet, but not because they believed that their children were in a bad school. I do not believe for one second that any parents send their children to what they believe to be an inferior or second-rate school. No, it was done because they knew that the future of the school was in question.

That is the sort of process that we have seen for all those schools. Knockmore was an exception to the rule, not because the parents of children at that school thought or functioned any differently but because there was a very simple rule there: the vast majority of children in that school are special educational needs in a special educational needs unit that could not and would not be replicated anywhere else in the education board's area. The reality for those parents was that they had absolutely nowhere else to go.

For that reason, and for the great campaign that they mounted, those parents did not withdraw their children from that school. I am pleased to announce today —

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: I will in a second. I am pleased to announce today that that school has been reprieved. I use the word

“reprieved” cautiously, because I feel that there is still an agenda at work.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Member for giving way. I find very favourable the news that he brings about Knockmore Primary School. It is indicative of this debate that he is bringing that news to the Assembly, and although he is the bringer of good news for one school, for my area and for other areas, he is unfortunately the bringer of bad news.

Does the Member agree that this is not the way in which we should be treated in this Assembly, when Members have gone to the trouble, and it was well noticed in advance, of tabling not only a motion but an amendment on the matter? However, the announcement seems to sterilise the debate that we are having. I hope that the Member will agree that we have a lesson to learn; namely, business should not be conducted in this way under any circumstances.

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

Mr Craig: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Not for the first time do I find myself agreeing with the Deputy Chairperson of the Education Committee. We have been treated appallingly here today by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. It was fully aware of what was being debated and could have held off its decision, even to take note of what is being debated in the Chamber.

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

Mr Craig: I appeal to the Minister to take all of those points into consideration. The South Eastern Board entered into a process that pre-empted the process that the Minister announced.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Craig: I ask the Minister to take that on board when he is looking at these proposals.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to debate this motion on school closures by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. I record our opposition and concern about how the proposals have been handled and progressed by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of Redburn Primary School. I have been a governor for over 20 years.

The main area of concern to date in my constituency of North Down has been the proposed closure of Redburn Primary School, which is located on the outskirts of Holywood, in an ideal location at the rear of Palace Barracks, with the Holywood hills in the backdrop. The school is over 50 years old and has been included in a new schools rebuild project for the Holywood area, which involves the building of a new amalgamated primary school, combining Holywood Primary School, at the present Priory College site. A new Priory College was also to be built at the existing Redburn site, and work was planned to start this year. A new nursery school was the final brick in the wall and was planned for construction on the old Holywood Primary School site.

This new schools project had full support from the wider Holywood community. We had gone through the full consultation process for newbuilds, planning permission had been approved, and the project was about to get off the ground.

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

In September, Redburn's board of governors was called to a meeting with officials from the South Eastern Education and Library Board to be told, totally out of the blue, that the board had had an internal review and had come up with a recommendation for closure as part of the draft development plan. The news of closure came as a shock to the pupils, parents, staff, governors and the local community. The school has served the area very well and has a rich mix of children from the wider community, including the army children from the local Palace Barracks. The proposed closure has rallied the local community, and, as part of the campaign, we requested a meeting with the board's chief executive and three commissioners.

The case for the retention of the school was put ably by the chairperson, the principal and the class teacher. The school's academic attainment and its excellent community links were highlighted. At the end of the meeting, I sought clarification on whether the school would be included in the Minister's review, which was announced in September 2011. I was advised by the chief commissioner that the school would be subject to the Minister-led review and to the review by the board.

Redburn School has been subject to two reviews at one time: one by the unelected and undemocratic board and the other by the Minister's Department. The children of Holywood do not need more reviews of existing schools. We need a commitment from the Minister to clarify the situation and indicate to the children of Holywood when a newbuild project is due to commence. The proposal to close Redburn is just a cheap solution to the real problem of substandard school buildings for the children of Holywood.

All school buildings in the town of Holywood are over 50 years old. We need new buildings rather than repair. We need capital investment in our school estate. Holywood needs and deserves a fair share of funding. The perception that Holywood, being part of North Down, is an affluent area that does not need such investment is wrong. That has been the attitude of the South Eastern Education and Library Board for too long. The loss of the board will be no loss to the children of North Down. The Minister needs to visit our area and see for himself the need for investment, not just closure and reviews. I support the motion.

Mrs Dobson: I support the amendment and am pleased to take part in this debate. However, I fear that this debate is taking a horrible twist, which cannot be good for the service that we endeavour to give to all of our constituents.

4.00 pm

As I have said in the House before, speculation and rumour about the future of our schools may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, and that can be dangerous for our entire school system. When we label a school as underperforming, the use of language must be clear because parents may choose to move their children from or elect not to send their children to a school that may be under threat. That very action may, unwittingly, threaten the future of the school. It could have more devastating consequences for the long-term viability of successful rural and urban schools across Northern Ireland and, indeed, for parents who are applying for school places for their children in the upcoming academic years in the SEELB and other board areas.

In speaking to support the motion, I would like to highlight, as a comparison, a school in Portadown that has recently had its application for a nursery unit turned down. Orchard County Primary School is a highly successful school that was established in 2005 through the amalgamation of two small rural schools — Annaghmore and Tullyroan — and I am sure that that mirrors the situation in the SEELB and other boards. Earlier this year, in recognition of one of the best inspection reports in Northern Ireland, the school was invited, along with others, to a reception in the Long Gallery by the Department of Education. The school has become a victim of its own success, and, like those we heard about earlier in the SEELB with high enrolment numbers for next year, Orchard County Primary School will not be able to offer any preschool provision, which has been one of the key planks in its and many other schools' continued success. Therefore, the school's application for a nursery unit was timely and forward-thinking. Indeed, the principal and governors have been heavily supported by the board, whose research clearly demonstrated that displacement would not occur were the nursery unit to be established. However the Minister, in his statement upon rejecting the application, said that there were

“already sufficient pre-school places in the area”.

Given that Orchard County Primary School forms part of the provision to which the Minister referred and will therefore not be able to offer any preschool places next year, the decision will lead to a direct reduction in preschool places available to parents and pupils in the area. In raising Orchard County Primary School as an example, I draw parallels with other boards.

Given the coming rationalisation of the school system, it sends a dangerous and worrying signal to schools, teachers, parents and pupils across Northern Ireland when a successful school such as Orchard County Primary School, created through the amalgamation of two rural schools, cannot receive the support it requires to meet the educational needs and demands of the local community. In this case, two schools were closed to facilitate one new, highly successful school. The Minister's promise to support successful schools was, therefore, not well received by the parents at a recent open meeting which I attended.

If decisions are not taken in a systematic and focused way, the initial elation at the publication of the Programme for Government and a statement that every child would be entitled to a preschool place has the potential to turn into a nightmare for parents and children who find that the practical reality of the statement does not live up to the promise. We will yet again hear of parents being offered places for their children an impractical 20 miles or more from their home or of pupils' applications being continually turned down.

It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that our children receive the best start to their educational experience. Although I am encouraged by the aspiration in the Programme for Government, I truly hope that that aspiration can become reality for parents and pupils across Northern Ireland.

Mr Givan: I support the motion, and I commend my colleagues for tabling it. I, too, do not think that I need to declare an interest. I was suspended from the board at the time when the budget and the special needs provision were

being reduced and, therefore, have considerable experience of how the board used to run and is now run. I should say that all elected members supported that position, including the Sinn Féin councillor who was on the board. From memory, I think that that was Councillor Coogan. Therefore, there was all-party support for the action that we took. Rightly or wrongly, commissioners were then brought in.

Any justification for the purpose for which the commissioners were brought in has long since passed. Therefore, their legal status is questionable. I know that the Minister of Education has said that that is a matter for the courts to decide, and, until they do so, they are the only authority on the matter. However, that does not take away from the fact that the right thing to do would be to remove the commissioners and to constitute the South Eastern Board on the same basis as the other boards. That is the right thing to do, and I do not think that anybody could disagree with that.

The commissioners on the board receive £500 a day, plus travel expenses. Some of them come from across the water. There is obviously an issue around that. They lack local knowledge of the issues that they have had to deal with. I have had experience of the commissioners. They are all very good people, and I get on well with those whom I have met. I do not want to call their integrity into question, far from it. However, that does not change the fact that locally elected councillors, transferor representatives or independents drawn directly from our community would make for a more accountable and better system. Although I recognise that ESA is on its way, I still think that the right thing to do would be to move as quickly as possible to reconstitute the education board.

I draw out the example of the development proposals that were formally put out by the board this afternoon as a rationale for saying that there should have been elected and independent members. I suspect that the argument that would have been put to the board and would have prevailed is that, although there may be question marks over the schools in question, a ministerial viability audit is taking place and it would have been better had a holistic approach been adopted, rather than the piecemeal approach that the South Eastern Board has taken.

Knockmore Primary School has been removed today — I welcome that — and will not now be put out formally to consultation for closure. Therefore, it has been saved. That is a welcome decision and a recognition of the campaign that parents, politicians and teachers all put in and on which they presented a very cogent case. That campaign has been justified, and that is the right decision.

I should, however, make the point —

Mr Poots: I join the Member in expressing my delight at the reprieve for Knockmore Primary School. The quality of service for the young people at the school, particularly that provided by the speech and language unit, would have been undermined substantially. I will also lay down the marker that it is very important that, whatever is done in the future relating to that unit, it is done in conjunction with all the key specialists involved and ensures that its current quality will be maintained for children in the future.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I also thank him for the role that he played in visiting the school and for making a submission on the issue as Health Minister.

When the Knockmore proposal was being put out, the board made it very clear that this was for the mainstream only. The special units attached to it were not part of the board's consideration. However, in its statement today, the board withdraws the proposal to close the mainstream school, which is secure, but says that it will look at the special units and that there is further work to be done. That would not have happened had there been a properly constituted board. You cannot, on the one hand, say that the special units have nothing to do with the proposal but say today that the mainstream is being kept but the board will look at the special units. That is not the right way to do it, and, if the board is going to do anything with the units, there needs to be a specific proposal. In my view, the board has handled today's decision badly. That would not have happened had the board been constituted properly. Therefore, the Minister should move to put the board in place through the normal procedures under which the other boards were appointed.

Mr Agnew: Many Members mentioned that we received a statement from the Minister earlier this year that outlined the plans for the viability audit and his proposals for area development plans. Within a week, if memory serves, the announcement of the proposed closure of a number of schools was made, in advance of the viability audit.

Members have outlined the three areas concerned in judging a school's viability: enrolment numbers, educational achievement and financial stability. There is at least some consensus that that is a way for us to assess schools' sustainability and determine whether they meet the needs of the children who attend them. The problem lies with the decisions of the South Eastern Education and Library Board to put forward schools in advance of the viability audit.

In my intervention in Mr Weir's contribution, I mentioned that we have an area-based plan in Holywood. Mr Dunne outlined the detail well. It would include a planned amalgamation of Redburn Primary School and Holywood Primary School. However, that plan has been put on hold because of the lack of funds for the capital investment that is necessary for it to go ahead. I think that there is some understanding in the Chamber of why that delay exists. However, it appears that there is no such understanding on the part of the South Eastern Board, as its proposal to simply close Redburn school without a plan is leading to uncertainty for parents. The decision was made on such a short-term basis that parents who enrolled their children in primary 1 at Redburn this year are now wondering whether they will potentially have to find another school for next year. The decision that was made was not informed because it was on such a short-term basis. Making a decision such as that without a plan is, essentially, a cut. It is not being done for any of the reasons that the Minister outlined. It is not due to enrolment numbers, educational achievement or financial sustainability. If that were the case, there would be a plan and it would be based on the needs of children in the area. However, what has been proposed by the board is to simply slice one school and leave it up to parents to find alternatives for their children.

I add my welcome to the decision to exclude Knockmore Primary School from the list of closures. Although I stand

here as a representative of North Down and have made specific reference to my constituency, Members will agree that we want to get this right not just in our own constituency but across Northern Ireland, in order to ensure sustainable schools, quality education and equality of access to provision. I spoke with parents who came here on the day of the debate on Knockmore Primary School and heard their concerns. Needless to say, many of those concerns echoed those of my constituents. It is right that we look at this issue across the board and not individually by school or constituency.

We must move forward with a plan. The viability audit must go ahead. The development of area plans must take place, and decisions should be made on that basis, not simply as a reaction to the thought that we must cut expenditure so we must cut schools. I do not think that that is an acceptable way forward, and it certainly will not be accepted by the parents affected by those cuts.

I support the motion and the amendment and welcome the debate. I hope that the Minister will have heard the concerns of Members —

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

Mr Agnew: I will just say finally —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Agnew: OK. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

4.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome today's debate as it gives me an opportunity to re-emphasise the key messages of my statement to the Assembly on 26 September. I might say that I thought that all those matters were covered in the previous debate on rural schools on 17 October, the Dunmurry and Knockmore debate on 25 October and recent responses to oral and written questions.

This debate has as its focus — they are not specifically mentioned — four schools identified by the South Eastern Education and Library Board for potential closure. As has been mentioned, since the Assembly broke up for Question Time, further clarification has come through from the SEELB in regard to those matters. Although I recognise the concerns that have been raised about those schools, many others face significant challenges. This morning's announcement that schools face a possible 5% reduction in their budgets cannot be divorced from the fact that we have too many schools and 85,000 empty school desks. Those two issues are not separate, cannot be divorced and have to be dealt with in a common way. That is why I commissioned the viability audit that has been referred to. We need to get a realistic picture of the extent of the challenges that schools face. Only when we face up to those realities can we begin to do something about securing viable and sustainable education for all pupils. I ask Members to look at the big picture.

Let us widen the focus and look at what we are trying to achieve through the programme of work I have commenced. I have asked the boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) to urgently undertake the viability audit or stress test using enrolment, quality of

educational attainment and financial stability as indicators of the degree of stress a school is facing. I am conscious that three of the four schools mentioned have gone to development process. I am now part of the decision-making process, so I have to be careful in what I say. The viability audit —

Mr McNarry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No, not at the moment, but I will later. The viability audit is looking at each individual school. The SEELB, like other boards, has information at hand showing that a number of schools have not passed that stress test. That information has now been brought forward to go forward to development proposals. The announcement in September was not an attempt to stall or delay such a process. It was a step up and acceleration of that process. If any board comes forward to me at this time and states that it already has information at hand about schools that are under stress and believes that the option is to develop a proposal for closure, I will say to that board to go ahead now and proceed immediately to that point. Why would I do that? Because at the heart of those schools are pupils. The pupils are what matter in this debate, not the schools, not the establishment and not the concerns of local MLAs or councillors.

I say this to Members who say that the board has only commissioners on it and has no locally elected representatives: are the Members suggesting that, if their colleagues who are locally elected representatives and councillors were aware of information concerning a school's enrolment, the quality of its education or its sustainability, they would ignore that? Are they suggesting that they, as elected representatives who have responsibility for public funds and, indeed, the well-being of our community, would ignore that? I sincerely hope that that is not the case. I sincerely hope that our elected representatives on boards would take a look at the report and say that, yes, action has to be taken on those schools because we have a responsibility to the young people in the schools.

The argument that the SEELB is made up of commissioners and that only they would move towards development proposals is, I think, a false argument. I will say this about the future role of commissioners in the SEELB: I, too, have concerns about the length of time that they have been there. It was because of a number of scenarios. It arose largely because of the on/off debate on legislation on ESA. I am thankful that we are now in a position to move towards a policy memorandum going to the Executive and, if that is agreed, to then move to a legislative framework to move ESA forward. I have asked my officials to carry out a preliminary examination of replacing the commissioners. That preliminary examination suggests that that will be unachievable before April next year and may not be the best way forward considering that ESA should be in place by 2013. However, I will ask my officials to re-examine the matter in order to move it forward and see whether we can remove the commissioners and put in place a properly constituted board. I have no wish for any commissioner to be in place. I believe in the democratic process, so, if we can achieve their removal, we should do so. However, it may not be viable ahead of the implementation date for the ESA.

Mr McNarry: I appreciate what the Minister is saying. I have here a report from the SEELB officers to the commissioners.

The report talks about the four schools. Members will have noticed that I did not mention any schools by name, but I will mention Ballykeigle Primary School now. It was asked why the board did not appoint a permanent principal to Ballykeigle. The answer was that, as a result of the review of the school, it was decided that the post of principal, when it became vacant, would not be filled on a permanent basis. That is the answer to what you said, Minister. I agree with you that the pupils are at the heart of our concern. However, we have gone beyond that now, given what has happened today.

Mr O'Dowd: I am not going to comment on any of the schools on which formal development proposals have now gone out. I will, however, say this: responsibility for the democratic nature, accountability and oversight of those development proposals falls to me as Minister. I will be the decision-maker. Now that there are formal development proposals that will go out to further public consultation, I, as Minister, will be able to receive delegations and hear the views not only of elected representatives but of the schools involved and any concerned stakeholders. I will take on board all those matters before reaching any decision about any of the schools.

I want to return to my point about the need to make decisions now. The viability audit does not prevent any board from coming forward with proposals. If boards have information to hand, they need to come forward with it. I am concerned that Members in this debate — I have no doubt that I will be responding to numerous debates in the months ahead, as we go through this process — are saying, "Not in my backyard".

I came across an interesting quotation at the weekend that at least one Member in the House will recognise. Others may recognise it as well. It is about the need for elected representatives, Ministers and the Executive to make decisions. We cannot continue with the school estate in its current form. We have to face the realities of the Budget and of delivering education in the 21st century, as others Ministers have done in their field. Let me read this to Members:

"There will be sectoral interests who will use their very utmost to ensure that the changes proposed don't happen ... Lots of other people will think 'I'm a supporter of change and it is great that you are doing something 500 miles up the road but don't be doing it in my area' or, 'It is great that you are doing it in that particular sector but don't be doing it in my sector'. Whatever comes out of this report that is in the interests of the population ... it is incumbent on us to meet the challenge and implement it."

Those are the words of our Health Minister, Edwin Poots. I am not criticising Mr Poots for that. He is absolutely right: we have to implement change and stand up to the difficult decisions that we refer to. Mr Poots went on to say that he would not run away from making difficult decisions. I can assure Mr Poots and the rest of the House that they will not see me in front of him on the running track: I will not run away from making difficult decisions either. Those decisions will be evidence-based and will be made in the best interests of the pupils whom we are here to serve. We are not here to serve schools or institutions. We are here to serve pupils.

I will move on. The audit focuses on three main areas. First, it identifies all primary and post-primary schools facing significant viability challenges in sustainable enrolment trends, delivering quality education and financial stability; secondly, it categorises those schools with regard to the root cause of the problem; and, thirdly, it presents proposals that are either already in place or planned for such schools to address the cause of lack of viability in order to protect the education of the children and young people enrolled in them. In the current financial climate, we must take action to make the best use of limited resources. There is, therefore, an urgency to have an assessment made in a consistent manner across all sectors. I am pleased to say that the boards and CCMS are clear about the importance of that work and have given it significant priority. They have identified indicators around enrolment, quality and finance taken from the sustainable schools policy that allow them to complete the task that they have been set.

The answer to Mr McNarry's question about whether the process had taken rural proofing fully on board is "Yes, it has". Accessibility and rural proofing are at the heart of the document. What is a rural area in the sustainable schools policy? We cannot get a broader definition than the one that I will give you from the sustainable schools policy: all areas are rural outside Belfast and the urban part of Derry. I cannot think of a broader catchment area than that. It is the broadest assessment of rurality in any government policy. I think that my predecessor and I have encapsulated the concept of rurality.

The motion asks me to intervene to stop the South Eastern Education and Library Board and to delay any decisions. I return to the point that I raised originally: why would I stop the South Eastern Education and Library Board carrying out its statutory functions? The decision-making process is being carried out by the SEELB, regardless of Members' views of its make-up — a point that I have already covered. The decisions are based on legislation. They are statutory, and the board is carrying them out. I say this to Members: it is carrying them out because it has identified factors in a number of schools that, board members believe, compel them to put forward a development proposal that suggests closure. That process has now landed on my desk, and I will take it forward.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Minister for giving way. Perseverance pays off, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I would appreciate it if the Minister would clarify the relationship that he has established between the viability audit and the boards' work on development proposals. When he announced the viability audit, he said that it was not intended to identify schools for closure. However, if I hear him correctly, he is making a direct connection to the viability audit process. If boards find a school susceptible under the viability audit process, they should be moved into the pre-closure process. Does he now make that specific connection? Is he telling us that any school that a board might identify now as vulnerable, under the viability audit, is susceptible to a development proposal immediately?

Mr O'Dowd: No. That is not what I suggest, and I did not suggest it in September. I went through some rigorous questioning when I made my statement in September.

The viability audit is to identify schools that are under stress for financial reasons, quality-of-education reasons or by reason of enrolment figures. When a school is identified as under stress and meeting those criteria, there is an onus on the board and the managing authority — CCMS or whoever it may be — to bring forward an action plan on how it intends to bring that school out of that position. That may, in some cases, include closure. If that is the decision, there is a duty on me, as Minister, to examine closely all the details and the development proposal. As I said, if difficult decisions are to be made, I will make them.

Members should not get into the habit of defending their local school because it is their local school. As I have said in the House before, Members need to defend the education of local people and the pupils attending a school, regardless of whether they are from an urban or rural community. That is what I am saying. If the board or the managing authority identifies a school under stress, it must also bring forward proposals on how it intends to bring that school out of stress, and that may include closure. None of this is easy. I do not relish the task ahead of me, but it is the right course of action. We can no longer move forward on the basis that we cannot make decisions in our own backyard because difficult decisions may be unpopular.

I also say this to Members: many schools that face enrolment or financial problems may also face educational attainment issues as a consequence.

4.30 pm

If you examine closely, you will find that many local parents have made the decision for you. They have decided that they will not send their child to that school. Take on board not only the views of the parents whose children still attend the school but the views of the parents who, for a variety of reasons, have decided not to send a child to that school. Factor this into your equation also: if we continue to keep unsustainable schools open, how thinly will we spread the icing, namely the finance available to the Department of Education? If we continue to keep unsustainable schools open, what will the real reduction in schools funding be in 2013-14 and 2015-16?

The financial situation is not improving; it is getting worse. Pressures such as inflation and energy costs are bearing down on our schools. If we continue to keep unsustainable schools open, we let down not only the pupils in that school and their parents but the pupils and parents in the school up the road, in the school next to that and in the school next to that. They will all suffer as a consequence. I ask Members to take that on board.

I have covered most of the points raised by Members. I answered Mr Easton's point about the future role of the SEELB and its commissioners. I have answered Mr McNarry's point about rurality. I will ask my officials to look at Mr Nesbitt's comments about Movilla High School and report back to him. I also want to refer to Mrs Dobson's comments about Orchard County Primary School. The principal contacted me directly and made a number of points, which I have asked my Department to investigate further. The issues that he highlighted deserve to be interrogated further, and I have asked my Department to do so.

Although Members may have concerns about the make-up of the SEELB and the role of its commissioners, they should not let those concerns cloud their judgement of what decisions are required to move forward and build a sustainable education system in this society and what decisions are required to ensure that education is provided to our young people in these very difficult financial circumstances.

I understand Members' concerns only too well. I am a constituency MLA as well, and I know the pressures that elected representatives can come under when issues such as this arise. However, without wishing to put Mr Poots on the spot, I refer you to his comments at a recent conference. I assure you that Ministers do not take difficult decisions because they want to; Ministers take difficult decisions because they have to.

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome the opportunity to debate the decision taken by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. The SEELB is run by a group of highly paid commissioners, who have recommended the closure of four schools: Knockmore Primary School in Lisburn, Dunmurry High School in south Belfast, Redburn Primary School in Holywood, and Ballykeigle Primary School in the outskirts of Comber. I take this opportunity to welcome the reprieve for Knockmore Primary School in Lisburn.

As a result of the SEELB's quick decision, there is an air of worry, uncertainty and anger. Parents are concerned about the education of their children, teachers fear losing their jobs, and children do not know whether they will be in the same school as their friends this time next year. On their behalf, I call on the Minister of Education to intervene. Each and every child has the right to an education. It is the responsibility of the Assembly to ensure that that education is of a high quality and accessible to each and every child.

On 26 September 2011, the Minister informed the House of the viability audit to be carried out on each school. I am pleased that the Minister is being proactive to ensure that the education provided to the children is of an excellent standard. In light of the viability audit, I fail to understand why this decision is being rushed through. I believe that it would be wise for the SEELB to halt its decision until a viability audit has been completed. Mr Craig rightly informed the House that, under the 1986 Order, a new education and library board should have been appointed in 2009. The Department of Education has, therefore, failed to fulfil its legal obligation.

I am keen to hear from the Minister why the commissioners are continuing in their position, considering that the practice is not in line with the legislation if they have the authority to make recommendations on school closures.

The Minister has been advised that he cannot discuss school closures until he receives development proposals, as he will adjudicate on the proposals. He has advised that once the development plans come to his desk, there will be a two-month period for discussion. However, we need the answers now. The rumour mill is rife. People are upset and fearful, and they cannot wait to get the answers that they need. I ask the Minister to step in to prevent those rumours and to give assurance to the pupils, parents and teachers.

I have particular concerns about the impact that the closures will have on the children, particularly those with

special educational needs. Few schools have the facilities and skills necessary to provide the valuable education to children with special educational needs. In Knockmore Primary School, one in three children who attend the mainstream school is catered for in a special unit. School criteria are set to assess the school's viability, and Knockmore is a viable school, ticking each checklist box. I cannot comprehend why the SEELB made the decision to close the school in the first place.

A case can be made for retaining each of the schools, but, due to time restrictions, we cannot go into the detail. However, I will conclude by saying that any decision to close the school should not be taken lightly. It should not be rushed into in order to meet departmental financial aims. Parents should be kept informed, and we need to consider the effect on the child, parent and community. Every Member who spoke today has made that quite clear.

Miss M McIlveen: I support the motion and the amendment. I thank my colleague Alex Easton for securing the debate and thank all who were involved in today's discussion, which, as often happens in education matters, has proven lively and informative. If anything, it shows the close contact that Members have with their constituents on such issues and the benefits of a local legislature in which those concerns can be aired. However, perhaps the debate has come about a little late, as the decision on the future of the schools has been taken by the commissioners earlier today. I agree with Mr McNarry's comments about how we have been treated in the House today, given that the commissioners of the board were aware of the issue being debated.

The decision to continue along the road to closure for Ballykeigle, Redburn and Dunmurry in advance of the viability audit being concluded is incredibly disappointing and devastating for the parents and staff who have put together quite amazing campaigns over the past number of weeks. That said, it is not too late for the Minister to intervene, and I understand from colleagues — it has been discussed here today — that Knockmore has been given a reprieve, and I congratulate my party colleagues and all those involved in that campaign to keep the school given its very particular circumstances.

However, it is unfortunate that Sinn Féin does not support the motion or the amendment. I think that that will sadden the rest of the House. That said, although the commissioners have come to a decision on those schools, it should not detract us from the debate at hand and the manner in which those decisions have been made.

The Minister is right. It has been evident for some time that a review of the school estate has been needed. The matter was raised time and again with the Minister of Education's predecessor, and it was a key part of the Bain report, as was the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. After a false start and a change of Minister, sense was finally seen over a number of key issues relating to the Education and Skills Authority, and we now have a new framework set out in the Programme for Government, which will be much more acceptable to stakeholders in education. I hope that the Minister pays heed to this debate in order that any mistakes or oversights can be addressed before it is too late.

Without doubt, we all need to consider carefully and, to a certain extent, dispassionately the rationalisation of the school estate. Daithí McKay referred to making decisions based on evidence rather than emotion. We all live in the reality of budgetary constraints and demographics that do not match our school provision. However, in saying that, I believe that every school must be given the opportunity to prove itself and that decisions must be made when boards are in possession of all the facts. No school should be prejudged, and full consideration should be given to the impact of closure on all the children attending a school and the surrounding community. That was a key tenet of the debate held just a few weeks ago on rural schools and their impact in serving communities across Northern Ireland. Mr McNarry echoed those points when he raised his concerns about the lack of rural proofing in the current process.

As my colleague and proposer of the motion, Alex Easton, pointed out, the Minister announced an immediate audit of every school in Northern Ireland under the sustainable schools policy, on 26 September. On that day, the Minister was clear that the sustainable schools policy was not simply a numbers game and that schools would be measured against the six principles of that policy. It is unfortunate, therefore, as has been debated widely today, that the SEELB stands alone in Northern Ireland as overseen by appointed commissioners and that it has apparently jumped the gun in earmarking a number of schools in the area for potential closure in advance of the completion of the schools audit.

The sword of Damocles has been hanging over a number of schools across Northern Ireland, not only in the SEELB area, for a considerable time, and that is thanks to poor leadership and strategic direction. Having spoken to a number of parents in some of those schools, I know that they are very clear as to where they feel the blame lies.

The difficulty with the Minister announcing that there are 85,000 empty school desks, which equates to 150 schools, is that reporters make matters worse and see it merely as a numbers game. The spotlight, therefore, fell on Ballykeigle in my constituency. Parents of children at that school are, understandably, despondent, but they are also angry at the lack of support and direction that they have been given over the years. There is a view that they have been left to wither on the vine. I know that there is a determination among them to fight for that school's survival, even after the announcement today. Today's decision will be devastating for them. Schools should be given the opportunity to put forward a case for survival, and that must be handled in an even-handed way.

Knockmore Primary School has received a reprieve today, but that highlights a wider problem regarding the Minister's announcement and the failure to include special needs provision in the sustainability audit. Given that, a school such as Knockmore primary has its special unit artificially separated from the rest of the school, by the board, for the purposes of calculating enrolment trends. By separating those units from what is termed the mainstream, the board can disregard the rise in enrolment in those special units. The Minister needs to address that urgently.

My colleagues from North Down spoke about Redburn Primary School in Holywood, and the proposer of the motion, Alex Easton, indicated how the school served an area of economic and social disadvantage. He highlighted the

massively important work that is carried out there in the field of community and social school integration. One of the key roles that a school can play is being at the heart of the community. That needs to be encouraged. Other Members highlighted their concerns about the impact that it will have on community provision, were schools to close. Mr Easton also highlighted the lack of accountability in the SEELB, compared with other boards. I concur with the positive comments made by Mr McNarry in relation to the board's chief executive, Stanton Sloan.

In moving the amendment, Mr McDevitt spoke of the undemocratic nature of the governance arrangements within the board, as did Mr Givan and other Members. I welcome the comments that the Minister made today about looking seriously at reconstituting the board in a democratic manner. Mr McDevitt also highlighted the need to develop a holistic approach to rationalisation and challenged us to explore a variety of models for the delivery of education across Northern Ireland. Mr Maskey found some of the comments made today regrettable, but what was being asked for was not that all schools be retained, but that a process be followed that allows for equitable treatment in respect of the viability audit.

Mr Weir and Mr Givan declared interests as former board members. Perhaps, I will leave it at that. Mr Craig was correct when he stated that no option other than closure was considered with regard to the four schools being discussed today. Self-fulfilling prophecy is the correct phrase to be used in respect of what the board was wishing to achieve. I also welcome the comments from my former pupil Steven Agnew, although I see that he is no longer in his place.

I move now to what the Minister said. We recognise that the decision to reduce the AWPU (age weighted pupil unit) is not divorced from the fact that there are too many schools. We also understand that there are schools that find it difficult to pass what he refers to as stress tests, but surely that should not be the only test. In his earlier statement, the Minister referred to the boards working with other sectors when looking at area planning but, today, the South Eastern Education and Library Board was looking at schools purely in the controlled sector. I know that the Education Committee would welcome the sight of the draft terms of reference for area-based planning as soon as possible.

4.45 pm

The House is not asking the Minister to run away from difficult decisions. We all have a mandate to be decision-makers. We are asking the Minister to ensure that all the evidence is adjudicated on in a fair and equitable manner.

In conclusion, I thank all those who took part in today's debate. Although we recognise the reality of the situation, it does not mean that we cannot raise the legitimate concerns of those in our constituencies. To ignore them would be failing in our role as their elected representatives and advocates — a role that I take very seriously. I very much hope that, in moving forward, the Minister has listened to the concerns raised today and will act on them to ensure that his Department and the boards — not just the South Eastern Education and Library Board — act in the best interests of the children being educated in our schools. Some valid points have been raised, and they need to

be looked at. Hopefully, the debate has served as an appropriate basis for that to happen.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the school closures announced within the South Eastern Education and Library Board area to date; is concerned that the board is making these decisions ahead of the outcome of the review of schools being conducted by the Department of Education; is further concerned that, unlike all other education and library boards, this board is run by commissioners with no political input; and calls on the Minister of Education to postpone any decisions until the viability audit has been completed.

Police: Independent Investigations

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. Although one amendment was selected and published on the Marshalled List, I understand that it will not be moved.

I inform Members that a valid petition of concern was presented today in relation to the motion. Under Standing Order 28, the vote on the motion cannot be taken today. The vote, therefore, will be taken at the start of business tomorrow morning after the public petitions listed in the Order Paper have been presented. The debate can take place today. I also remind Members that another effect of the petition of concern is that tomorrow's vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Mr G Kelly: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce effective measures to ensure that information and evidence provided by former or serving police officers is retained and released to any independent investigation into allegations of police wrongdoing.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a rá go bhfuil mé lán-sásta tús a chur leis an díospóireacht seo inniu. I am glad to open the debate for Sinn Féin, and I speak in favour of the motion. Let me make it clear from the outset that the matter we are debating is one of public confidence in the administration of justice. It is a matter of demonstrating that everyone, even those who are former or serving police officers, are subject to the rule of law. It is a question of ensuring that allegations of wrongdoing against members of the police are either upheld or, just as importantly, dispelled through that process.

For those reasons, I welcomed the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment and would have encouraged all parties to support it. When it comes to confidence in the administration of justice, equality under the law and holding the Police Service to account, the Assembly should be capable of speaking with one united voice. I am disappointed, therefore, that Members of both unionist parties across the Chamber have instead decided to collude to prevent that from happening. The Ulster Unionist Party's decision to withdraw an amendment that could have won cross-party support in deference to a petition of concern by the DUP which, I am sure, people realise will polarise the Assembly at least on this issue, reveals, perhaps, that other agendas are at work. The debate will have to tease out those agendas, as well as to emphasise that the onus is on the Minister of Justice to act on public concerns, and I will return to that a bit later.

It must be recognised that the call for former members of the police to co-operate with the Police Ombudsman's investigations is not party political. Many families and human rights groups have called for it, and the PSNI's senior management team has also expressed its support. Action is required, and the framework must be put in place to facilitate that goal.

Nor is this a new requirement. In 2007, the five-year review of the powers of the Police Ombudsman considered

improvements in law that would enable that office to increase its effectiveness in carrying out investigations. The former Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, submitted a report to the British Secretary of State, which was laid before the British Houses of Parliament in June 2007. In that report were 26 recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the Office of the Police Ombudsman. Recommendation 13 stated:

"That the Police Ombudsman be given a power to compel retired police officers to submit to witness interview, answer questions and provide all relevant documentation to her, which is within their possession, custody, power or control when she is conducting criminal investigations involving grave or exceptional matters."

Mrs O'Loan's term of office expired before the British Secretary of State acted on that recommendation — or, indeed, the 25 other recommendations that were contained in her report. Instead of action, we got the appointment of Al Hutchinson, and we all know what has ensued since then. That has been well documented in the Assembly through the reports by the Minister's appointee Tony McCusker, the Committee on the Administration of Justice and the Criminal Justice Inspection. I emphasise that it was unionists who argued forcefully that Criminal Justice Inspection should be able to investigate the Police Ombudsman, because they were unhappy at some of the findings of the previous ombudsman.

In summary, most of the recommendations for improvements in the Office of the Police Ombudsman were never implemented, and that includes the failure to implement the recommendation on the compellability of retired police officers. The evidence base for that recommendation has been clear to see over many years in investigations that were impeded or impaired because serving or former members of the police withheld information and co-operation. Some of my colleagues will give some of those examples, but let me highlight one case that occurred in my constituency and that people will be very well aware of: the killing of the human rights lawyer Pat Finucane. In an interview broadcast by BBC's 'Panorama,' an RUC agent, Ken Barrett, stated that Pat Finucane would have been alive today if the police had not interfered, and 22 years after Pat Finucane was killed, we know that five of those who were involved in his killing were agents of the RUC and/or British intelligence. In other words, there are people who were paid from the public purse who held information and evidence about a killing, and 22 years later, those people, who include those who handled the five agents who were involved in the killing, have yet to come forward.

That brings to the fore a central concern that is a challenge to the unionist body politic. Time and again, we have heard calls from the main unionist parties for people to co-operate with police investigations. Yet there is also a suggestion that unionists have condoned non-co-operation by the police or by ex-police officers with investigations by the Police Ombudsman. We have also heard incendiary and inflammatory criticisms of Police Ombudsman investigations by police staff associations, and both the Police Federation and the Superintendents Association have made their grievances against the Police Ombudsman clear. Ironically, a former president of the Superintendents Association, Bill Lowry, lambasted the Police Ombudsman over the Omagh bomb investigation and went on to make a complaint to

the office himself a couple of years later. To make matters worse, a number of former RUC and PSNI officers who left with their Patten severance, which, as you will remember, was very generous, are now being rehired as civilian staff. Call them what you want — every time we ask the question there seems to be a different name for them, such as agency staff, police associates or consultants — it resembles a form of patronage and cronyism that is an abuse of public finances. Sinn Féin will raise that matter again when the Policing Board meets on Thursday. As I conclude, I suppose that one of the questions to the Justice Minister is: to whom are those agency, associate or consultant staff in the police accountable?

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

Leave out all after "released" and insert

"when necessary for any investigation." — [Mr McCallister.]

Mr McCallister: I am not moving the amendment, not out of any talk of collusion, as Mr Kelly suggested, more because the amendment was to have been proposed by my colleague Ross Hussey, who is in hospital. That is why the amendment will not be moved.

Amendment not moved.

Mr Givan: I oppose the motion, and, had the amendment been moved, I would have opposed it as well. This issue, which is raised repeatedly by Sinn Féin, is an attempt to go back and again drag the RUC over the coals. That is really what it is about. I know that they will talk about wanting to get truth for the families and all of that, but that is not what the motion is about. It is about the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Sinn Féin trying to continue the war that it lost when the IRA was involved in its terrorist campaign. Those IRA members — some on the Benches opposite were in it — cannot get over the fact that they lost the war. However, they want to make sure that they run down the reputation and the memory of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. That is the context in which the motion was tabled, and Members should look at it in that light.

It is hypocrisy to say that the standard for current and former police officers is that they must provide evidence and give all of their information, but we will draw a line in the sand as to what the IRA did. We will not have those individuals called in and compel them to give their evidence. No, they are now part of the peace process, and the Belfast Agreement dealt with that, but we will continue the vendetta against the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Well, this party will not stand by and allow Sinn Féin to denigrate the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and we will not support the motion.

Again, we have the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), with which republicans do not co-operate. They will not provide evidence to the HET. It may be that Members of the party who sit on the Benches opposite, who, when asked by the HET to give evidence, do not and are reluctant to do so. If they were genuine about wanting to bring closure to the cases of all those people who lost their lives, they might volunteer their information to the HET rather than not take part in its investigations. They do not do that, because they do not want the truth to come out about the dirty sectarian war that the IRA was engaged in. However, they will try to denigrate the Royal Ulster Constabulary. That is the agenda of the Members on the Benches opposite.

Over the weekend, we again had the issue of the 49 cases that the HET said it cannot deal with. The Office of the Police Ombudsman has said that it does not have the legal ability to scrutinise that work either. We are in a legal limbo. Some have put it out that that is because of European regulations that require an independent body to deal with this. The more that I have looked into it, the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 seems to be the issue, as opposed to Europe. That Act states:

"The Chief Constable shall refer to the Ombudsman any matter which appears to the Chief Constable to indicate that conduct of a member of the police force may have resulted in the death of some other person."

It is not that the HET cannot deal with those cases because of some European ruling around independence. If the legislation needs to change, and on this we put a clear marker down, these cases will be dealt with only within the same parameters as the HET uses when considering all of the other lives that were lost during the campaign.

The Sinn Féin Members opposite want a distinction to be drawn —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No. In a moment, I may need another minute.

Sinn Féin Members want to make a distinction between those 49 cases and the other 3,000-plus cases, because it wants a different level of interrogation — some of them have been good at interrogation in the past — for those 49 cases than all of the others. Its Members want the Police Ombudsman to deal with those cases so that they undergo a greater deal of scrutiny.

Let us be clear; the HET can look at those cases. If legislation is needed, it will be to allow the HET to look at them, because it is able to look at the cases that involve the army. If the army is regarded as part of the state, there cannot be a different logic that requires an independent body. The HET is able to review the cases that the army was involved in, so why treat other cases differently? We know why the Members opposite want them treated differently.

5.00 pm

Mr McDevitt: I am a bit confused because, of course, the HET does not carry out investigations. It cannot, because it has no investigative powers. It carries out reviews, which are quite separate from investigations. The question is to do with the powers that the Police Ombudsman has or does not have. The ombudsman does not have those powers. For reference, I believe that the Act in question is the Police Act 1997, not the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

Mr Givan: I was referring to Part VII of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. The HET is able to carry out a review of what took place in relation to an investigation, and, where there is evidence, it can bring a prosecution. Perhaps that is why the Members in the republican movement do not want to engage with the HET, because you can be brought to some form of justice. However, the Belfast Agreement obviously mitigates what justice would be brought against those who were convicted pre-1998. We need to be clear about the motivation and set it in the context of what Sinn Féin is really about on this issue. Members will then be left

with only one conclusion, which is to vote against the motion that is before us.

Mr McDevitt: I am a bit confused by the argument that we cannot possibly provide much greater power of retrospective investigation into the very tiny minority of people who brought, or could potentially have brought, the name of the RUC into disrepute, because that would sully the memory of the RUC. Surely the way to best honour the memory of the RUC, if that is something that you are interested in doing, is to be able to robustly defend the right of anyone who wants to challenge the behaviour of a tiny minority in that organisation; it is not to provide a cloak of uncertainty around the whole organisation. The other thing that I find interesting is that that is the view of the current leadership of the PSNI. The senior PSNI officers with whom I have had occasion, privately or publicly, to discuss this matter — I have had opportunities to get them on the record — are very keen that we extend the legislation so that a duty to co-operate is placed on former police officers. I cannot see why anyone would not be keen to bring about that situation, because it provides us all with a greater degree of clarity.

I do not buy into the argument that blames the RUC for everything that was wrong with Northern Ireland from that organisation's establishment until its end — not at all. However, I do argue robustly, with the greatest respect to those who served in the RUC and are interested in defending its memory, that the best way to do that is to provide a mechanism that would isolate and identify the small minority of individuals who may have brought that organisation into disrepute. That is the situation that we have today with the PSNI. The way in which we defend the robustness of the Police Service today is by having real mechanisms that allow us to identify those who, potentially, bring it into disrepute and to hold them robustly to account. That is not threatening to anyone's history, nor does it undermine anyone's legacy. I suggest that it is quite the opposite. It is the best and most surefooted way of being able to robustly defend the integrity of an organisation that is no longer with us.

There is a broader issue, of course, which Mr Givan has every right to raise. It is the broader question of truth and of dealing with the past, and the potential imbalance between the standard to which you may hold a state authority accountable and the standard to which you may be able to hold a paramilitary organisation accountable. My opinion, and that of the SDLP, is that they are the same standard. It is not because of a lack of will or trying on our behalf to introduce the same standard for both organisations that we are here today. It is because of the House's collective inability to face up to the fact that those standards must apply to everyone.

Therefore, when we set out on a journey towards a new beginning for policing and rooted that new beginning in the fundamental obligation of the PSNI, the Governments and the Executive to article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, we did so in the absolute knowledge and certainty that, sooner or later, we would come to the point that we are at today when legacy issues would also need to be tested against that standard. My appeal to the House is what I suspect would be the appeal of the PSNI's chief officers if they were sitting here today: let us hold everyone to the standard of policing today. If we are genuinely interested in honouring the legacy of a previous service, let

us be able to validate, through robust investigation, that the vast majority of people who served in it can also be held to that standard.

It is for that reason that I support the motion. It is a matter of regret that my party's amendment was not accepted; however, I will not challenge, or even question, the Speaker's authority in that regard. On that note, I will finish.

Mr Dickson: The public and the police expect independent and effective complaints and oversight systems to ensure that there is confidence in the Police Service. Therefore, the debate is welcome. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the topic of information and evidence provision by former and serving police officers to independent investigations.

At the risk of the debate giving the perception that current measures for the retention and release of evidence and information are defective, it is worth noting and considering the processes that are already in place. At present, the Chief Constable is required to provide the Police Ombudsman with all relevant material from serving officers to enable the investigation of complaints against the police. The ombudsman has powers of search and arrest on criminal matters. There is also a code of practice that sets out the manner in which police officers are required to record, retain and reveal to the prosecutor material that has been obtained in a criminal investigation that may be relevant to that investigation. Therefore, it is not apparent that provisions that relate to serving officers are inadequate. It is also worth noting that the Criminal Justice Inspection report states that the legislative foundations of the Police Ombudsman's office are comprehensive and robust.

Nevertheless, we must recognise concern that has been felt about the ombudsman's inability, outside criminal matters, to compel former officers to attend witness interviews, answer questions and provide documentation that is relevant to that officer's investigations. Indeed, the statutory review of the office in 2007 recommended that the ombudsman be given such powers. One key objective that has symbolised the existence of the ombudsman's office is that of building confidence in the Police Service. We must, therefore, consider carefully measures that will help to achieve that aim.

Although there is some merit in the motion, its timing and lack of clarity work against it. In response to a written question from Margaret Ritchie in June 2011, the Minister informed us that the question of whether former officers should be compelled to assist the work of the Police Ombudsman is one that the ombudsman wishes to consider in the forthcoming five-year review of legislation that governs his office. Perhaps the Minister could give us details of when he is likely to receive the review and whether there are likely to be recommendations on matters that we are discussing in the debate. Perhaps the Minister could also inform the House whether any such recommendations would be subject to public consultation.

Those are important questions because if an upcoming review is to make recommendations on the compelling of former police officers the subject of further and wider consideration, it would be unwise of the Assembly to pass the motion or any amendment, although I accept that no amendment has been presented. Therefore, despite there being some merit in the motion, my party cannot support it.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, will oppose the motion and support the petition of concern that has been tabled by our party. I am fully supportive, as I think that everybody in this House is, of ensuring that evidence and statements are handled in a professional and accurate way, but the spirit in which this motion has been brought forward has been very well outlined by my colleague Mr Givan, and we have considerable difficulty with the sentiment behind it.

We have to accept that the issue of evidence gathering is not only questioned in Northern Ireland; it will come up around the world. We have seen evidence-gathering issues in the Stephen Lawrence case, the Madeleine McCann case and in the case of Amanda Knox in Italy. The whole issue of evidence gathering is not specific to Northern Ireland, although when you listen to some of the comments from the opposite side of the House, you would think that the issue just exists in Northern Ireland. So, we have to put a very large question mark over the motivation for bringing the motion forward. I do not believe for one minute that it has anything to do with an improvement in public confidence in policing, broadly speaking, or, indeed, anything else for that matter.

Even looking at it in the spotlight of common sense and taking the politics out of it for a minute, can we imagine the bureaucracy that, if allowed to go through, the motion will cause for the PSNI? A recent report from the Crown Prosecution Service highlighted some very telling figures. Almost 80% of police prosecution files that were reviewed contained a much larger than necessary amount of paperwork, and, secondly, despite the volume of paperwork, over half of the files did not give an adequate summary of the case. So, those figures appear to show that the vast amount of paperwork a police officer must do is entirely counterproductive. If the motion is allowed to go through, it will add additional bureaucracy to that.

Therefore, whilst I welcome the opportunity to have a sensible debate on this important issue, we cannot and must not create or contribute to a culture of fear amongst those involved in law enforcement. I use that word guardedly, but the PSNI must be free to do its job without spending most of it doing paperwork to protect itself rather than spending its time fighting crime.

If I felt for one minute that this Sinn Féin motion was in the interests of justice, I think that all of us would have open ears. However, I do not believe that the motion is anything to do with justice because, ultimately, it has not been brought to the House with a view to improving the handling of evidence or statements. It is simply another unashamed attempt to vilify police officers and create the perception of police wrongdoing. We need to promote and encourage public confidence in our judicial process, and, if there is a need to look at evidence management, it is right that we do so. However, the impetus behind this motion is neither a move to improve public service standards nor an attempt to increase public confidence in the evidence-management mechanisms that are in place. It is a continuation of the long-running demonisation of former police officers in the overall Sinn Féin context of perceived police wrongdoing.

I find a certain irony in this motion because its wording includes a reference to the retention and release of information. However, it seems to me that Sinn Féin may not want to sort out the retention, or rather more the release,

of information from amongst its own ranks before it points its fingers at our police service. The difference is, of course, that our police are fully held to account and under legal obligation to disclose all that they know.

I will certainly oppose the motion, and I feel that the impetus on which it has been brought is highly questionable. For that reason, we, as a party, will oppose it.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am very disappointed with the DUP attitude, and I am sure that we will hear from others during the debate who claim to support the upholding of law and order here. It is disappointing that we have this two-faced attitude when it comes to wrongdoing on the part of the police.

Unionists could help to build confidence in policing and in the administration of justice if they got rid of that two-faced attitude. Where there is any suggestion of wrongdoing, no matter by whom, unionists should be calling for anyone with evidence to come forward and give it to the relevant authorities. There should be no ifs or buts.

5.15 pm

Let me give some clear examples of what the motion is about. In case there is any misunderstanding, it is not only about investigations that are carried out by the ombudsman's office. The first example is the inquest of Pearse Jordan. Nineteen years ago this month, Pearse Jordan was shot dead by the RUC on the Falls Road in west Belfast. Since then, there have been 130 pre-inquest hearings. Many of them have been the result of legal attempts by the police to avoid coming forward and telling the truth and of trying to obstruct the family from getting to the truth. Sergeant A, who is named in the inquest papers, has since retired from the police and is in receipt of a police pension. He is outside of the jurisdiction now, but his pension is forwarded to him by the PSNI, and the PSNI also forwards any requests from the coroner to attend hearings. Unfortunately, he does not answer those requests, and, for some reason, the police cannot say where he is. That is damaging to the cause of building confidence in policing.

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: Right.

Mr Newton: Will the Member condemn as reprehensible the members of Sinn Féin who have refused to co-operate with inquiries in which terrorist activity from an IRA source was involved?

Mr Sheehan: We should get the balance right. The most recent academic research from Queen's University suggests that almost 40,000 people were in prison between 1970 and 1998 as a result of the conflict. How many of those were police officers?

We are talking not only about incidents relating to the RUC. The PSNI shot Neil McConville dead in County Down. The ombudsman's report highlighted the fact that two senior officers preferred to resign rather than co-operate with the investigation. Maybe there was no culpability at all on their part, but the families do not know that. If people refuse to co-operate with investigations to shield others from investigation, they themselves become complicit. Refusal by

serving or retired members to co-operate with investigations is unacceptable.

The destruction of notes and information relevant to investigations is also unacceptable. One damning example of that was brought to light by the Duffy family. They are trying to recover information about the killing of their loved one by the LVF. That relates to information, including interview notes and intelligence information, that was being held in Gough Barracks. I am pursuing answers on that at the Policing Board, but I have yet to receive any satisfactory answers. I have been told that they were destroyed because of asbestos contamination. It appears that there was no real effort to retain the information. The police had a duty to retain it and should have retained it, but they did not.

In conclusion, we need to continue to build confidence in policing and in the administration of justice. One way to show that all Members are united in that idea is to support the motion.

Mr Poots: Many of us find these debates somewhat tedious, and the fact that Sinn Féin keeps pressing this agenda is getting a little boring. We will not wear this selective retrospection and rewriting of history, and we will not assist Sinn Féin in doing that.

Sinn Féin wants us all to live in two different worlds. We will have the real world, and they will have their virtual world. In the real world, Gerry Adams was a member of the IRA; in Sinn Féin's virtual world, he was not. In the real world, Martin McGuinness was a member of the IRA; in Sinn Féin's virtual world, he left it in 1974.

Of course, in the case of Mr Adams, one can peruse the comments of Brendan "Darkie" Hughes, who made it very clear that Mr Adams was an officer in command of the Belfast brigade of the IRA. He indicated very clearly — and this is a former colleague who is referring to them — that he could have stopped Bloody Friday. He further indicates that, on Mr Adams's leaving prison shortly after that period, a number of people were disappeared, including Jean McConville.

This is the real world, but Sinn Féin does not want to talk about that. Martin McGuinness left the IRA in 1974. Well, he did not kid the people in the Republic of Ireland, and he will not kid the people in this House or in Northern Ireland on that issue. So Sinn Féin will not get away with rewriting history or labelling the RUC and seeking to have honesty from one section of the community while they get away with telling lies continually about their past and what their organisation was engaged in.

In the real world, the IRA killed more people than every other organisation put together. The IRA committed the most murders. Do we get calls today from Sinn Féin that the IRA should step up to the mark, that we should get honesty from that organisation, and that every inquiry that takes place should see real honesty? No, it stands behind Martin McGuinness, who said that he would operate by the code of honour when it came to the Bloody Sunday tribunal. So we spent £200 million apparently trying to get the truth, but whenever it came to getting the truth on the part of that particular organisation, we did not hear what the truth was because some code of honour that the republican movement had was of greater importance than the victims or, indeed, anybody else who was involved on that particular day.

The quest for honesty has to provide full honesty. This party will be stubborn and belligerent when it comes to those issues, so get used to it. We will not be giving in on those issues. Those days are gone. Those days are over, and we will stand four-square to ensure that that is the case.

There is a very clear perception among the people I represent that, under the previous ombudsman, there was a witch-hunt of the RUC. We also make it very clear that, in doing that, article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights was breached. With regard to rectifying matters, it is absolutely essential that section 62 of the Police Act, which enabled the ombudsman to make inaccurate and damaging public statements that are not subjected to any recognised evidential tests and yet are not vulnerable to challenge, also needs to be changed.

Mr Givan: Would the Member agree that if such a change were to happen, it may increase the confidence of the police in dealing with the ombudsman?

Mr Poots: The ombudsman's office has certainly come under a degree of criticism over the years, and not just in recent years. For many years, people from the unionist side of the family have had a perception that the ombudsman's office had a degree of bias. And yes, although unionist people would have used that office because there was no alternative when they had complaints to make against the police, nonetheless it was very evident that the police were gone after by the ombudsman's office.

So if all of that is to facilitate an organisation that wants to rewrite the history of Northern Ireland to make it appear that their organisation was justified in some way or means in their failed attempt to get a united Ireland, we will not be accepting it, co-operating with it or working with it. If they wish to continue pursuing these debates, they will find that the answer remains the same. We will not be facilitating them in any way, shape or form.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I call Mr Basil McCrea, I ask Members to stick to the subject of the motion and to make their remarks through the Chair.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall do my best to follow your direction.

There seems to be a certain amount of heat being generated by this debate. With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is worth saying that this is sometimes a proxy battle. The issue is that we have not dealt properly with the past, so we are looking for ways of dealing with it through procedural avenues.

I have some sympathy with the argument that questions how you can have two different standards. The problem, as I saw it, was that, when the Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement was signed, the thing that was put to me — as a citizen, not as a politician — was that we were going to put the past behind us and find a way of resolving these issues and of moving forward. The real problem when people look at evidence — it is not being talked about here — is when we put arms beyond use without taking forensic evidence. That forensic evidence, were it available, might tell a tale or two. However, for the sake of our children and for the sake of moving forward, we declined to take that evidence. Therefore, because other people will not speak out, we are left with a one-sided debate.

I believe just as much as anybody, maybe more than some, in a positive and proactive shared future. I really want to find a way of addressing the injustices of the past and of moving forward. Going on, over and over again, about one-sided investigations destroys morale and takes it to people that say that this is not the way forward. So, when it comes to this issue, we have to find a way of addressing the past and of deciding what we will put our resources into, because, if we do not address the past, we will have no future.

On that basis, I will conclude, because this is a debate that is going nowhere.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion. There are a number of high-profile cases in which there has been non-co-operation from former police officers. There are three that I will outline. For example, Sean Brown, who was chairman of Bellaghy GAC, was murdered in May 1997 by a gang that called itself the Loyalist Volunteer Force. No one was ever charged with the killing of Sean Brown, and his family expressed serious concerns about the RUC investigation into his death. They made a number of complaints to the Police Ombudsman, and in 2004 a report upheld the family's complaints. The report found that a senior member of the RUC refused to co-operate with the Police Ombudsman's investigation. It found that a box full of documents relating to the killing of Mr Brown had been lost by the RUC. It also found that crucial evidence relating, in particular, to cigarette butts found at the scene of the killing had not been subjected to proper forensic examination.

The Police Ombudsman's investigation into the Omagh bombing was also hampered by the refusal of serving and former members of the RUC to co-operate. Worse again was the attitude of senior members of the RUC and PSNI to the Police Ombudsman at the time. The insulting remarks of Ronnie Flanagan, who offered to take his own life rather than accept the findings of Nuala O'Loan's report, demonstrates just how much resentment and resistance there was to an independent investigation by the Office of the Police Ombudsman. More recently, the Police Ombudsman's report into the Loughinisland massacre, which was published earlier this year, also served to justify today's motion.

5.30 pm

I wish to highlight only a few examples from that report. A police informant was connected to the getaway car used by the killers. After the car was recovered by the police, that agent was contacted by his handler, but the details of that exchange have yet to be disclosed. However, it is now known that ten months after the car was confiscated by the RUC, it was destroyed. That was in contravention of all policing guidelines. No authority was given for the getaway car to be destroyed. As well as the car, and any evidence that may have been lost, other crucial forensic evidence was not taken from suspects in the car.

Finally, a Cheann Comhairle, the Police Ombudsman's report makes it clear that the senior investigating officer who led the original case refused to co-operate. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr A Maginness: One of the great achievements post-Good Friday Agreement was the creation of the PSNI, a police service that enjoys the confidence of the vast majority of our community. Whether Catholic or Protestant, nationalist or unionist, republican or loyalist, there is a wide spread

of support for the PSNI. That is a great achievement and something to be valued and treasured.

I think that we should be very grateful to Lord Patten for his report, which established the PSNI and brought forward radical and effective reforms to policing in Northern Ireland. The other architect who brought tremendous energy to the job and to the task of restoring confidence in policing was, of course, Nuala O'Loan, the Police Ombudsman.

Mr Spratt: She was one of your cronies.

Mr A Maginness: I do not think that she was a crony. Across the political spectrum, she is a highly respected person. She has universal respect; let me put it that way. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Moderation, please. Through the Chair.

Mr A Maginness: If you want to know how to do the job of ombudsman, how to bring about confidence, how to insist in the development of good policing methods and how to bring about civilised values within policing, ask Baroness O'Loan. That is fact, and I think that Members across the way are letting themselves down by their petulant attitude towards Nuala O'Loan.

The basic argument put forward by the proposers of the motion is correct. We do need a mechanism whereby former police officers can be compelled to assist the Office of the Police Ombudsman. In my view, that is a self-evident and reasonable proposition and is something to which no reasonable person could object. How it is done may be a matter for debate; nonetheless, it should be done. It is something that senior police officers in the PSNI support, and it is right and proper that they should do so. It strengthens their organisation when former members of the RUC give evidence and support the work of the ombudsman's office. Indeed, many police officers have done so. However, as regards those who resist the call and who object: why do they object? What do they have to hide? Why are they obstinate in their objections to presenting evidence to the Police Ombudsman in the exercise of his or her duty to examine complaints against the police?

It is clear that we are talking about establishing standards, upholding ethics and reinforcing values in today's Police Service — a police service that has shown itself to be an exemplar of policing in the Western World and something of which we should be rightly proud.

I will go back to Nuala O'Loan, the previous Police Ombudsman. In 2007, she made 26 recommendations, one of which was to compel former police officers to give evidence to the Police Ombudsman in the execution of his or her duty. That remains to be implemented —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr A Maginness: — and it should be implemented.

Mr I McCrea: In considering the motion, it is only right that we ensure that any evidence that is gathered from a crime scene be treated and collected appropriately. I would hate to see anyone who is guilty walk away free owing to inaccuracies in the collection of information.

The DUP is committed to making sure that effective measures are in place to ensure that evidence is handled

professionally so that criminal convictions can be secured. We in Northern Ireland are no different to anyone anywhere else in the world. Indeed, only recently we saw in Italy how Amanda Knox was acquitted of the murder in November 2007 of Meredith Kercher, after gloves that were used at the crime scene were found to be contaminated. There are many other examples in England and, indeed, here in Northern Ireland of cases going to court but then collapsing owing to the ineffective handling of evidence.

Many victims live in our society without answers as a result of no one ever having been convicted for their hideous and monstrous crimes. The Historical Enquiries Team should be allowed to carry out its work to bring closure to the people whom we represent.

As some of my colleagues said, the motion, particularly its last sentence, represents an attempt by Sinn Féin to single out the PSNI, or, more accurately, the RUC, where historical cases are concerned. Since the ceasefire, republicans have trawled the name of the RUC through the dirt to justify their dirty sectarian war. I want to state how proud I am of the men and women of the RUC and the PSNI, who stood in the front line against those who wished to attack and murder our people. We should remember that there was never any justification for the atrocities that were carried out throughout the years of our troubled past.

Those criminal organisations, some of whose members now sit in this Chamber under the title of "elected Member", were responsible for some of the most hideous and monstrous crimes that the world has ever seen. It is quite hypocritical of Sinn Féin to debate the motion in its current form. I hope that it will practise what it preaches, for I have no doubt that many of the party's members, as former IRA members, have information that will be of interest to the authorities and, indeed, the victims. I hope, therefore, that Sinn Féin and the IRA hand over any information that they have that may help to resolve the many cases of terrorism that, as yet, remain unresolved.

The RUC and other legal law enforcement organisations were left during the Troubles to work in some of the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. That made evidence gathering amid the carnage difficult. That is no justification but a matter of fact.

I, for one, would welcome the conviction of those members of the IRA who were responsible for the crimes that they hide behind and that remain unresolved. Similarly to my colleagues, I will oppose the motion, and I encourage everyone else to do the same.

Mr S Anderson: I also oppose the motion. Yet again, we are debating a Sinn Féin motion that I believe is inspired by nothing other than an inbuilt hatred of the RUC. It is motivated by a determination to denigrate and vilify those brave officers who helped to defeat the IRA, because defeated they were. As has been already said, they cannot get over that fact. I know that Members opposite will say that I have got it all wrong, and that their attitude to the RUC is not the issue here and that the motion is simply in the interests of justice, but, as they say in my part of the world, I did not come up the Bann in a bubble. I know, and they know, what this is all about.

The motion speaks of "police wrongdoing". That loaded terminology says it all. The endless criticism and carping

from Members opposite about the Police Ombudsman is all about a wish to get their own back on the RUC. The ombudsman is not doing what Sinn Féin wants him to do to its satisfaction for a variety of reasons; therefore he is not acceptable and Sinn Féin's bottom line is that he must go. I have said it before, and I will say it again: the RUC was an outstanding police force that stood between us and terrorism. Over 300 of its members sacrificed their lives in the battle against terrorism and in the protection of this Province.

Sinn Féin mentions "police wrongdoing" in the motion. Some Members opposite might be reasonably close to those who engaged in wrongdoing against the RUC — those who murdered brave officers and injured many others. I even suspect that they might know who they were, and, if they do, it is long past time for them to bring forward the fresh evidence required to bring those evildoers to justice, because let us not forget that many of them have never been brought to account for their crimes. The lives of police officers have the same value as all other lives.

Mr Poots: Does the Member agree that the lives of lawyers are equal as well? As there has been a constant campaign about one particular lawyer killed during the Troubles, perhaps Sinn Féin Members could give us some advice on how we can get justice for Edgar Graham, a colleague of yours who lost his life as a consequence of the actions of their colleagues in the IRA?

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Member for his question. I mentioned Edgar Graham during the Finucane debate. He was a great young academic and a promising young lawyer, and was taken out in an evil manner at the young age of 29. The time has long since gone to get the information so that those who perpetrated that evil deed could be brought to justice.

In my mind, the loss of a police officer is far greater than that of a committed terrorist who goes out under cover of darkness fully intending to murder, but who instead encounters the forces of law and order. When Sinn Féin faces up to the bloody reality of its past, then we on this side of the House might just begin to take its views on these issues a bit more seriously.

There has been talk about Nuala O'Loan and the Ombudsman's office in the past, but that office operates with limited resources. That being the case, I believe that the time is long past for us to concentrate on the present rather than the past. Some people have recently demanded that some cases concerning the RUC should be revisited by the Ombudsman's office, but we should not seek to change the law to allow that office to conduct fresh investigations without fully considering all options.

I urge the Justice Minister to give the issue very careful consideration and not to allow himself to be cajoled into responding to a republican agenda. As has been said, and I will say it as well, we on this side of the House will certainly not be cajoled, and we have no intention of giving any credibility to what I believe is another witch-hunt against the RUC, like the many we have seen in the past. I oppose the motion.

5.45 pm

Mr Newton: I am obviously going to agree with my colleagues in all that they have said. We are observing

another motion from Sinn Féin — it is very similar to others that it has tabled over the past few weeks — which has absolutely no chance of going anywhere and is really just politically motivated from a republican perspective. Sinn Féin has not tabled the motion with a view to improving the investigative standards of the Police Service or, indeed, to increasing public confidence in the systems in place for dealing with evidence gathering. The purpose of the motion is to continue the demonization of police officers, particularly the RUC. Sinn Féin's perception is that all RUC personnel have committed wrongdoing.

The motion is politically motivated. It is an incompetent motion. It is careless in its wording. It reeks of hypocrisy, and, indeed, it comes from an organisation that has a past of glorying in murder and mayhem. That is the motivation for the motion. Of course, they would like the police to be held accountable for everything on which there is some perception that the police have made an error or done something wrong, or Sinn Féin thinks that they have done something wrong, with the perception also that there should be no investigation and no one coming from an IRA background should be held to account for the murder of police officers. Those who have been engaged in terrorism are to walk free, but the police are to be held accountable for every perception of what they might have done wrong.

The motion is incompetent. The motion states that information should be released "to any independent investigation". The word "independent" means something that is:

"2. Free from the influence, guidance, or control of another or others; self-reliant ...

3. Not determined or influenced by someone or something else; not contingent: a decision independent of the outcome of the study."

Sinn Féin wants to release any information on gathering of evidence to someone or some organisation that meets the standard laid down — independent.

We do, of course, live in a democracy. It is acceptable for MLAs to table a motion about the retention and gathering of evidence. However, this motion has been tabled only — as David McIlveen mentioned — to create fear around officers that whatever they do would be bogged down so much in paperwork, bureaucracy and red tape that an investigation would never come to a conclusion. That is what they have aimed at in the criticism of RUC officers. When there was mayhem, murders, bombs going off and terrorist activity taking place on a daily basis, the RUC officers should have been entirely meeting all the paperwork at that time.

We need to ensure that there are professional standards and that the standards of evidence and forensic gathering are indeed of a professional nature. However, we also need to make sure that those officers who met the standards that were applicable at that time, who were not criticised within the echelons of the —

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. We heard Mr Maginness — who has left the Chamber now — talk about the previous ombudsman. Does the Member accept from me that the Police Federation for Northern Ireland was one of the first organisations to welcome the independent investigation of complaints against the police? In fact, the

problem arose that the incumbent in the ombudsman's office highly politicised every action that she took.

That was the reason why there was no co-operation whatsoever by police officers with her office. They did not trust that office and the way in which it was handled by that individual, who was so highly praised by the SDLP.

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I very much agree with what he said. The key word that he used was "independent". We, the police and any organisation believe that we should encourage everyone to co-operate with an organisation that is independent. We do not find Sinn Féin willing to co-operate with any organisation that wants to look at past misdemeanours that it may have caused.

Where officers met all the standards of the RUC, the investigation standards and the professional standards for —

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

Mr Newton: — law enforcement agencies, which we know that they met, there should not be —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Newton: There should not be a witch-hunt of those who are now being judged against current standards.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Allister: There is a sphere of the law called equity, whereby people make a case that the outcome that they require is an equitable necessity. There is a rule that governs the law of equity, and it is that the person seeking that remedy must come with clean hands. Today's motion comes from those who represent an organisation with not clean hands but blood on their hands. As has been said quite rightly by several Members in the House, the motion does not seek an equitable solution across the board to a legacy issue — and this is a legacy issue. The motion seeks a partisan, party political and self-serving outcome as a means to further the campaign to vilify the RUC and, indeed, its successor, the PSNI, as has been said.

On the theme of coming to the House with this motion and making these demands with clean hands, one could well ask the mover of the motion and the speakers to it whether they have told all they know about the crimes in which they were involved. Has Mr Gerry Kelly told all he knows about the Old Bailey bombing, about those who were engaged in the background organisation of that and about those who helped in any capacity? Has Mr Sheehan told all he knows about the crimes of which he was duly convicted? Have Members on those Benches told all they know about some of the most notorious incidents in recent years, such as Enniskillen, Whitecross, Kingsmills and Teebane, or do they harbour in their hearts and in their ranks secrets — dark, bloody secrets — about all of those matters? So before anyone from the Benches occupied by Sinn Féin points a finger, they should remember the number of fingers pointing back at them. Let them be the first to lead by example. There is so much that they could do in that regard but never will.

Mr Givan, when he addressed the House, was right to identify the hypocrisy —

Mr Poots: Attacking unionists.

Mr Allister: The hypocrisy —

Mr Poots: Attacking unionists.

Mr Allister: Sorry? I am attacking unionists?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. For the third time, I have to ask that Members please make their remarks through the Chair and not across the Floor. Continue, Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I am staggered by the sedentary intervention from Mr Poots to the effect that I am attacking unionists. I thought, since I got to my feet, that I had been exclusively attacking Sinn Féin. If Mr Poots, as a Minister with Sinn Féin in the Government, feels so precious about them that, in some way, there is some sort of cross-fertilisation and he feels attacked, I am sorry. However, I was making the point that Mr Givan was right to attack the rank hypocrisy of what Sinn Féin Members have said in the debate and what the clumsily worded motion seeks to convey and where it seeks to go.

However, if Mr Poots wants hypocrisy, I could well say that, yes, there is hypocrisy in demonstrating the depth of knowledge about the real Sinn Féin and elevating those same people to the top and the heart of government.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Member will resume his seat. The Member should stick to the motion and he should not point his finger in any direction. Will you continue, please?

Mr Allister: I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will recall that I was led down that path by Mr Poots's sedentary intervention. However, there it is. The point is quite clear: if the cap fits, let it be worn by both —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please. Your time is up.

Mr Allister: As I said at the beginning, this is a legacy issue. It is one that can only be addressed in the context of equitable —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. He will resume his seat.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I must say that I am at a bit of a loss. I am not sure whether I am supposed to respond to the motion or to the debate. There was precious little connection, in most of the contributions, between the words of the motion and the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please respond to the motion.

Mr Ford: As Minister, I must respond to some of what was said in the debate, although I shall also attempt to respond to the motion. Mr Kelly, in proposing the motion, effectively called for police officers to be compellable to co-operate with the ombudsman. He also asked to whom civilians who had previously been police officers were accountable. They are, of course, accountable to the Chief Constable. The ombudsman has specific responsibilities to those who have the particular power of a constable. However, the ombudsman and his predecessor have both highlighted the issue of accountability of civilian staff when those staff carry out duties that are analogous to policing-type functions.

Meanwhile, in response, DUP Members mostly seemed to see the debate as an opportunity to restate their support for the RUC and the PSNI. I think that Mr Allister agreed, although I am not sure that Mr Poots agreed that Mr Allister agreed. At least, at the end of the debate, Mr Newton considered something of the wording of the motion to which I shall now attempt to return, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is right and reasonable that the Assembly should debate issues like this.

The timing of the debate is perhaps opportune but also slightly premature because, in the coming months, I intend to use the ombudsman's five-year review, which I received today, and the Department's internal consideration of the Office of the Police Ombudsman, on which work has been ongoing for some months, as the means for a public consultation on a range of matters relating to the legislative provisions that govern complaints against the police. Of course, I will welcome Members' views at that stage, as we proceed through the process. So before we pass motions on what should be done, perhaps we should, at this stage, look to see what the current situation is.

At present, under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, the Chief Constable is obliged to pass to the Police Ombudsman all relevant materials to facilitate the investigation of complaints made against the police. That includes the provision of serving officers' notebooks, duty statements and other documentation. In matters that are potentially criminal, police officers can be subject to criminal interview within the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which apply to any citizen. The majority of police officers who attend for criminal interview do so in a voluntary capacity. In matters that are criminal, the ombudsman has, under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, powers of search and arrest.

Of course, as has been stated on a number of occasions in the debate, in matters of simple misconduct, the ombudsman cannot order an officer to attend for an interview if that officer decides not to, but the ombudsman can request that the PSNI order the officer to attend. An officer's failure to do that may well constitute a breach of regulations and the PSNI code of ethics.

I remind Members that misconduct is by definition not criminal activity. The powers that are granted to the police and others to deal with matters of criminality are probably greater than those granted to deal with misconduct.

6.00 pm

Stewart Dickson specifically outlined the obligations on the Chief Constable; I shall not restate those. The code of practice that was issued under Part II of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 sets out the manner in which police officers are to record, retain and reveal to the prosecutor material that has been obtained in a criminal investigation that may be relevant to an investigation.

As was said in the debate, the Criminal Justice Inspection report concluded that the legislative basis for the work of the ombudsman's office is solid and provides the necessary framework for the operation of an independent complaints body. However, there are also operational protocols in place that help to define the relationship between the ombudsman's office and the police. It is now the practice that officers send all police-related documentation to the

PSNI archive when they leave the PSNI. It is acknowledged that that was not always the case. In the past, it was common for officers to retain notebooks and journals after they left the service. Therefore, in respect of the retention and release of evidence from officers, I do not see the existing provision as inadequate. There is already sufficient legislative provision to deal with the retention and release of evidential material from officers in general criminal matters.

It is clear that, unless the matter involving former officers is criminal in nature, there is no legislative requirement to compel former officers to co-operate with the ombudsman's office. Such investigations depend on the co-operation of former officers through attendance at interview and making available documentation that they may have retained. As I said, the ombudsman's office has been engaged in its second five-year review of its governing legislation, the report of which I received today. I have obviously not had time to study it. However, in that review, there are references to the Police Ombudsman being empowered to compel former or retired officers to attend interview as a witness and to provide all relevant documentation in their possession to the Police Ombudsman when he is conducting investigations involving grave or exceptional matters. Those issues were highlighted specifically by Conall McDevitt and Alban Maginness.

I have stated on previous occasions but will restate for Stewart Dickson's benefit that I will consult publicly on the five-year review in the coming months. The basis for the consultation will be to best serve public confidence in policing. Today's debate should inform how we progress the issue of compellability and whether there is consensus on the need for such powers. Hopefully, we may establish whether there is a need for any other powers to improve and enhance the operation of the ombudsman's office in a less heated atmosphere.

The public and the police have a right to expect an effective and independent complaints system. It is a key part of the policing architecture in Northern Ireland and is intended to secure public confidence in the Police Service. The system for current complaints is fully functioning. We now need a fully functioning system to deal effectively with historical cases. There is, of course, the key issue of ECHR compliance in dealing with historical cases; Mr Givan and Mr McIlveen made that point in the debate. The Justice Department and I will take the steps that we properly can to enable and support that. However, I listened with interest to Basil McCrea making a point that I have made on a number of occasions, which is that the institutions of the justice system that deal with historical issues cannot be proxy for the Assembly as a whole dealing with the past in a collective and inclusive way.

I have noted the various points made in the debate. I believe that those should inform the wider consideration of the powers of the ombudsman, first by me and then by the Assembly as a whole. The issues raised today should not be judged prior to my consideration of the issues raised in the ombudsman's five-year review. Today, we have heard diverse opinions on the call for additional provision in respect of the retention and release of information from officers. Therefore, I will not support the motion today; I believe that it is premature. However, I will carefully study the issues raised in the debate. I expect the House as a whole to participate as we consider the five-year review.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an leasaithe inniu. I will speak on the motion, but I will preface my remarks by saying that I hope that you will read Hansard. Sinn Féin represents the people who elected us to be here and no one else. Comments were made today, and, in previous times, the Speaker has cautioned people about their language. In light of that, I hope that you will check Hansard.

In debates like this, it is sometimes appropriate to remind Members of the motion. It states:

"That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce effective measures to ensure that information and evidence provided by former or serving police officers is retained and released to any independent investigation into allegations of police wrongdoing."

We would have accepted the Ulster Unionist amendment, which would have inserted "when necessary for any investigation" after "released", and I am a bit disappointed that they did not propose it. We accept that Mr Hussey may be sick, but the amendment was tabled in two other names, and I think that they should have proposed it. It would have added to the substance of the motion and the debate.

In proposing the motion, Gerry Kelly laid out the context, which is to create equality before the law so that there are proper investigations. I do not think anyone should fear that. There is public concern, which is that investigations are incomplete and have not been proper and thorough, simply because former police officers and certain police officers do not have to co-operate if they do not wish to. All of us should try to circumvent and prevent that for the future, and I do not think anyone should fear that. Indeed, in all the speeches that were made, I never heard anybody put forward a reason why someone would not want to co-operate with an investigation.

We get the usual feeling that people think that the motion was somehow a plot to undermine the RUC. There is no plot, and, if former RUC officers have nothing to fear, why would they not co-operate? Why will they not just come forward and say that they will co-operate in an investigation? No one gave an explanation for that. You all spoke, and Edwin Poots described the debate today as tedious. It was so tedious that there were, I think, six contributions from the DUP, and the Health Minister is so busy with his portfolio that he can take an hour and a half out to come to a tedious debate. Therefore, there are a lot of contradictions, and people are not focusing on what the motion is about.

Mr McIlveen, in a very temperate contribution, talked about three cases: Stephen Lawrence, Madeleine McCann and Amanda Knox. If anyone here tonight heard that a former officer involved in any of those cases had refused to come forward, simply because they did not want to, would you say that that was good conduct or bad conduct? I think most people would say that any person who can help an investigation should come forward.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way and for saying that any Member who has information should give it. I am sure that a special arrangement can be made for yourself if you want to go to the nearest RUC or police station and give whatever information you have after the close of business today.

Mr McCartney: The RUC stations are closed.

Mr T Clarke: You seem to demonise the RUC stations. I am quite happy to call them RUC, PSNI or police stations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. Members must show moderation at all times. They should not personalise the debate.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Deputy Speaker for his intervention. May I suggest, through the Deputy Speaker, that the Member opposite could arrange a suitable time after the business today to go to the nearest police station and give any information that he or any other Members who are sitting on the Benches with him may have? If he is so passionate about justice, getting all the information brought forward and the truth, then give it out.

Mr McCartney: Again, rather than focus on the argument, he takes us to another place. You have had many opportunities to table that type of debate. Today's debate is about trying to bring about a situation —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will resume his seat. I am not going to allow any more cross-Chamber chat. I will note the names of Members who continue to do that and report them to the Speaker.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister and Stewart Dickson said that this was not a timely motion or whatever. Four or five years ago, the ombudsman put forward 24 recommendations, one of which was to deal with this subject. We all know what happened then. That is why we feel that the motion is timely. We welcome the fact that the recommendations and the review of the ombudsman's office are now in your office and that you will go to public consultation. However, this recommendation was made four years ago. It went through the filter.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member's giving way. You seem, on one hand, to be saying that you accept that the Department of Justice will now handle the five-year review seriously, but, at the same time, you insist that we should go ahead with the motion today. If you accept the bona fides of the current Department and the current Minister, surely you accept my commitment to that consultation; therefore, today's motion is inappropriate.

Mr McCartney: It is not inappropriate. We are saying to you in very clear terms that, in our opinion, you have to bring in legislation that will compel former officers of the RUC to provide evidence to investigations. That is our political position. You may have a public consultation; that does not undermine the consultation that you have to carry out. We are saying that because officials in your Department were the people whom you had to initiate investigations into and reports on because they interfered in the work to ensure that those recommendations would not see the light of day. We can shake our head and pretend that that was not the case, but we all know what happened. We all know that that went on between officials in your office and people in the ombudsman's office to undermine those reviews.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. The Member must not make any reference to officials.

Mr McCartney: OK. I was not making reference to any officials of the Assembly; I was making reference to a public investigation. It was a point that I had to make. It is not an attack on officials. That is on public record, and it is publicly stated. I am not challenging the authority of the Speaker, but I am putting in context the remarks that I made. I want to stress that point.

In relation to a number of contributions, I want to make this point, and I want to say it in this context: the HET did a report on the shooting dead of a woman in Derry city. It was then tasked to find out the names of the four British soldiers who were involved in that incident. Nowhere on public record, either in the investigation, the Coroner's Court or anywhere else, are the names of the people who were involved in that incident, except one — the person who was responsible for shooting the person dead.

The HET asked to speak to the RUC officer who was in charge of the investigation and of handing it over to the Royal Military Police. They wanted to interview that person to ask them a simple question: what was the name of the British soldier who conducted the investigation? He refused to co-operate.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: No, I am not giving way.

He was not asked any questions, and he was not asked to provide any secrets. He was asked a simple question: would he come forward and be part of that investigation? He refused. If people are telling me that that is how we want to take this forward, they have big questions to ask. That cannot be seen by the people who see a plot and a theory every time a person raises a question as to how an investigation was carried out at a particular time. People cannot dismiss this as some sort of plot against the RUC, when people in the HET made a very simple request. That request was to speak to an officer. They did not make any allegation of wrongdoing or mishandling. The HET asked to speak to him to see if he could inform it of the names of the British soldiers, which are not on public record. Bear in mind that in the North of Ireland a situation pertains in which four people can take part in a shooting incident and provide evidence to the Coroner's Court, yet their names cannot be traced anywhere. That is the reason why.

We have seen situations in which former RUC personnel have taken with them their notebooks, and we have seen programmes in which they have willingly co-operated and provided their notebooks. In fact, one of them has said that he once tried to sell it to a Sunday newspaper. If they can do that in those circumstances, why would they not come forward to help in an investigation either by the Police Ombudsman or the HET? I want to stress that those who see a plot to denigrate anyone are the people who have something to hide. That is why —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McCartney: —some people have run away, as usual, from the core of the argument and turned it into a smokescreen about something else.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members that a valid petition of concern has been presented in relation to the motion. The vote will be taken as the first item of business tomorrow morning.

Adjourned at 6.15 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 29 November 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Community Pharmacies

Mr Speaker: Mr Kieran McCarthy has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. I remind him that he may refer only to the parties from whom the petition comes, the number of signatures on it and state briefly what the petition is about. That should take no longer than three minutes. I call Mr McCarthy to present the petition.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I take the opportunity to present to you a petition on behalf of more than 105,000 patients and users, and probably more, from right across Northern Ireland, in opposition to the funding cuts that have been imposed on community pharmacy over the past few months. Funding cuts of around £38 million that were introduced on 1 April this year will reduce the total funding to community pharmacy by some 30% in one year. That is having a devastating impact on the community pharmacy service.

Local pharmacies play a vital role at the heart of our communities, and they must be allowed to continue to do so. For many, the local pharmacy is the first port of call. It is where they go if they have a minor ailment, and that takes a major burden off our already pressurised surgeries and hospitals. We should be looking at ways to maximise rather than reduce the use of community pharmacies. If pharmacies can no longer provide services and are forced to close, a key front line health service will be lost, with a knock-on effect of increased costs to our overall health service.

Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) has warned us of the impact of the funding cuts, and we have already seen their impacts. Some 75% of contractors are being forced to reduce staff, many are struggling to meet wholesalers' payment demands and there has been a reduction in some of the patient services that pharmacies were previously able to offer.

The situation is dire. The Minister and John Compton have recognised the important role that community pharmacies play in our health service. CPNI wants to work with the Department and the Health and Social Care Board to find a solution that will protect this essential front line healthcare service.

The Assembly has already had its say on this issue, unanimously passing a resolution on 25 October 2011 calling on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

“to put a contingency plan in place to protect pharmacy services in rural and socially disadvantaged areas

following the introduction of new funding arrangements.”
— [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p118, col 1].

Now, it is turn of the public to have their say and have their voices heard loud and clear. I believe that 105,000 signatures, gathered from every village, town and city in Northern Ireland, may be a record for a public petition presented to this Assembly. There are many more signatures still out there.

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

Mr McCarthy: I, along with all those signatories, urge the Minister and the Health and Social Care Board to reconsider the level of funding for this vital front line service.

Mr Speaker: I must insist that the Member finish.

Mr McCarthy: Mr Speaker, it gives me —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to present the petition.

Mr McCarthy moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and send a copy to the Chairperson of the appropriate Committee.

Ms Ritchie: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In view of the serious allegations that have been suggested in 'The Guardian' newspaper about a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, will you ask the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the Leveson inquiry, whether they could investigate the matter and make a statement to the House?

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the Member knew, as soon as she was on her feet, that that was not a point of order. It has absolutely nothing to do with this Assembly. We should now move on.

Public Petition: Brontë Library, Rathfriland

Mr Speaker: Mr John McCallister has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. Once again, I remind the House of the need to be brief when presenting a petition.

Mr McCallister: I will take your advice and be brief, Mr Speaker. The petition is about the concerns in the local community in Rathfriland and the surrounding district about the changes in the opening hours of the Brontë library in Rathfriland. We had a debate here a few weeks ago about the concerns of various communities, and my local area is no different. There is huge concern in the district about the changes in Rathfriland and the impact that they will have on families and young children, on people's learning, and on unemployed people who use the library for its internet access and all the facilities that a library can provide. I am pleased that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure is here to see the petition being presented and to be made aware of the numbers of people in the district who have concerns about the matter.

Mr McCallister moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and send a copy to the Chairperson of the appropriate Committee.

Private Members' Business

Police: Independent Investigations

Motion proposed [28 November]:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce effective measures to ensure that information and evidence provided by former or serving police officers is retained and released to any independent investigation into allegations of police wrongdoing. — [Mr G Kelly.]

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that a valid petition of concern was presented yesterday in relation to the motion on the retention and release of information from police officers. Under Standing Order 28, the vote could not take place until at least one day had passed. The vote will, therefore, be the next item of business this morning. I also remind Members that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 34; Noes 58.

AYES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.

NOES

Unionist:

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

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr I McCrea and Mr McQuillan.

Total votes	92	Total Ayes	34	[37.0%]
Nationalist Votes	34	Nationalist Ayes	34	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	50	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Plenary

Mr Speaker: The deputy First Minister wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr M 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 thirteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 18 November 2011. The Executive Ministers who attended the meeting have approved this report, and we make it on their behalf.

Our delegation was led by the First Minister, Peter Robinson MLA, and me. In addition, the following Executive Ministers were in attendance: Minister Farry, Minister Foster, Minister Kennedy, Minister McCausland, Minister Ní Chuilín, Minister O'Dowd, Minister O'Neill, Minister Wilson, junior Minister Anderson and junior Minister Bell.

The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The following Irish Government Ministers were also in attendance: the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore, Minister Noonan, Minister Quinn, Minister Howlin, Minister Bruton, Minister Burton, Minister Deenihan, Minister Rabbitte, Minister Coveney, Minister Reilly and Minister Varadkar.

At the meeting, the Council exchanged views on shared economic challenges and the factors contributing to low economic growth, particularly the instability and fiscal contraction in other EU and global economies. Ministers discussed co-operation on the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and the banks and opportunities to make savings through mutually beneficial co-operation. The Council also explored collaboration to meet emerging challenges in third-level education and reviewed the significant contribution of the agrifood sector to the economy.

The Council discussed a progress report that was prepared by the NSMC joint secretaries on the work of the North/South bodies and in the other NSMC areas for co-operation, and it welcomed the mutually beneficial co-operation taken forward at NSMC meetings. Ministers noted progress on EU-related matters raised at NSMC meetings, including collaboration to maximise drawdown of EU funds from the FP7 research and development programme, progress on current EU programmes and potential for co-operation on future EU programmes.

Other key developments included the official opening of the peace bridge over the river Foyle, co-operation on common agricultural policy reform and on the all-island animal health and welfare strategy, and the agreement by the two ambulance services of a memorandum of understanding to provide for cross-border assistance in the event of major incidents.

It was noted that the two Education Ministers are undertaking a survey to review the sustainability of rural primary schools in the border region. Proposals concerning the relocation of Foras na Gaeilge posts to Gweedore were discussed, and it was noted that there would be a discussion on this at the next NSMC language meeting.

Progress on the Ulster canal is progressing incrementally, with the planning process ongoing.

The Council approved the appointment of chairpersons, vice-chairpersons and members to the boards of the North/South implementation bodies and directors of Tourism Ireland Limited. Ministers noted that the nominations that had been brought forward would provide both continuity and fresh perspectives to the bodies' work. Details of members appointed were published with the joint communiqué and have been placed in the Assembly Library. Ministers expressed their appreciation for the work of the outgoing chairpersons, vice-chairpersons, board members and directors and commended their significant contribution to the work of the bodies. It was agreed that the joint secretariat would write to them conveying thanks on behalf of the Council.

The Council discussed the significant contribution that tourism can make to the economy and opportunities to work together. Ministers highlighted the success of the MTV EMA awards and the associated tourism benefits for the North. The Council explored opportunities to work together to boost the tourism industry and maximise the benefit of forthcoming initiatives in both jurisdictions such as NI 2012, which includes the Titanic centenary, the Derry City of Culture in 2013 and 'The Gathering', a year-long programme of events in 2013 driven by arts, sports, business and community groups.

The Council discussed progress on a north-west gateway initiative and agreed that the NSMC joint secretariat will convene a meeting of officials from relevant Departments in both jurisdictions, who in turn will consult their Ministers with a view to a further progress report being presented to the NSMC institutional meeting in the spring of 2012.

The Council noted progress on the A5 and A8 projects and agreed that payment of £3 million will be made by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund in accordance with the agreed procedure. The Council noted that the Irish Government will now provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the project. Ministers reiterated the Executive's commitment to the project and noted the Irish Government's commitment to deliver it on a longer timescale. It was agreed that the relevant Departments will now prepare a new funding and implementation plan for the projects for agreement at the next NSMC transport meeting with endorsement at the next NSMC plenary meeting. We would encourage officials to work together creatively to see what improvements can be made soon to the A5, as some stretches are well below the standards needed for that important route.

The Council agreed that a number of proposals to advance the first elements of the St Andrews Agreement review will be discussed at the next round of NSMC meetings in sectoral format with a view to decisions being taken at the NSMC plenary meeting in June 2012. A way forward on the other elements of the review was also agreed. That will include consultation within the Executive and the Irish Government, discussion at the NSMC institutional meeting in the spring of 2012 and final proposals agreed at the NSMC plenary meeting in June 2012.

The Council noted the background and recent developments on a North/South consultative forum and agreed to finalise deliberations on that issue at its next plenary meeting. The Council welcomed work taken forward by working groups of the Oireachtas and the Assembly, including joint meetings in September in Parliament Buildings and in November in the Houses of the Oireachtas, in Dublin. A further joint meeting is planned for 15 December 2011.

Ministers approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the joint secretariat, including an NSMC institutional meeting in spring 2012 and the next NSMC plenary meeting on 15 June 2012.

Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the deputy First Minister for that. It seems to have been quite a comprehensive meeting. There are a number of issues, but I would raise two questions. The first is around NAMA. Although it is mentioned in the statement, there does not appear to be much information on it. I would be grateful if the deputy First Minister would give us some more information and the relevance of it to Northern Ireland and the impact on the properties and market for properties in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, I note that work on the Ulster Canal is progressing. What agreements are there on finance for the Ulster Canal project and has there been any agreement between the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland Governments on finance for the Ulster Canal?

Mr M McGuinness: We had a useful discussion at the plenary meeting on issues relating to NAMA, and its ongoing work will have a significant impact here for some years. I think we are all very conscious of that. We again strongly pressed the Taoiseach for a dedicated representative on the NAMA board to raise and highlight issues that are of concern to us here in the Executive and Assembly. Minister Noonan, who gave us a briefing during the meeting, acknowledged our request. He agreed to consider it and come back to Minister Wilson at another bilateral meeting.

11.00 am

We have continuing concerns about how trading businesses are being dealt with by NAMA and about reports that NAMA's response to some business plans has been slow, causing undue difficulty. We will continue to monitor the situation closely. We welcome the engagement that we have had in the past and the new liaison arrangements that have been established for our MLAs and MPs to contact the agency. We also highlighted the fact that equity funds have expressed interest in investing in companies and releasing them from NAMA. We said that it was important for NAMA to embrace these opportunities. There is an acceptance in the Irish Government — Michael Noonan in particular — that we have to work very closely on this issue, which is of such immense significance to the whole island.

We noted the progress that has been taken forward incrementally on the restoration of the Ulster canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. The strategic environmental assessment report and plan and the environmental impact assessment have been completed. Meetings have been held with the relevant statutory authorities, and the public and planning notices have been issued. Assuming that all runs to plan, it is expected that planning permission could

be received some time in the summer of 2012. Land acquisition could then commence and be completed in 2013. The contract for the construction phase of the project should be awarded in 2013, and the Irish Government are engaged in a comprehensive review of expenditure, which we are all conscious of, in which all of their expenditure is being reviewed. So, officials will keep in contact with Waterways Ireland with a view to advancing the projects to the fullest extent possible within the financial constraints. The Irish Government have indicated that they are committed to the project but that it may be suitable for phased implementation.

Given the current economic circumstances and some of the decisions that are now coming out of Dublin and are due to come out in the coming days, we are all very conscious that many of these projects are subject to finance being available. So, until such time as there is clarity on what is available, it is impossible to say the speed at which the projects will move forward. Suffice it to say that we are all very concerned, particularly when it comes to the Ulster canal, that we utilise all our resources to ensure that we have increased tourism, not just in the North. The ability of tourists to travel on the canals throughout the island of Ireland would bring economic benefits to us all.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. He will be aware that tourism is vital to the Northern Ireland economy generally and the Belfast economy in particular. Given that there are significant anniversaries and centenaries coming up, such as the commemoration and celebration of the Titanic next year and the signing of the Ulster covenant, can he assure the House that all is being done by Tourism Ireland Limited to attract visitors to Northern Ireland and increase the number of visitors to our country?

Mr M McGuinness: We are all very conscious that we have an exciting period ahead of us, given the issues that you mentioned in your question. We are all very much looking forward to the 2012 opening of the Titanic signature project, which will be a world news story of considerable import. Already, it is clear from discussions that we are having with people around the project that even here, on the island of Ireland and the North specifically, people are lining up to book the facilities that are available. All of that augurs very well.

We had a useful discussion on tourism at the plenary meeting. All of us are keen, particularly given the economic circumstances, to boost tourism on the island of Ireland. Additional funding has been provided to Tourism Ireland specifically to help to achieve that. That will be discussed at the next Tourism Ireland meeting. Over the next 12 months, Tourism Ireland will invest millions of pounds in the most extensive programme of marketing activity around the world that has ever been undertaken for the North. We have had some very positive stories on the tourism front recently, and all of us applaud the huge success of the MTV Europe music awards in Belfast earlier this month. I hope that we will derive benefits from that in the form of increased tourism in the future.

As we know, several major events are coming up, including the centenary of Titanic's maiden voyage, the opening of the Giant's Causeway visitor centre and the City of Culture celebrations in Derry. It is important that we maximise tourism benefit from those events. We have made a commitment in the Programme for Government to ensure

that those events are a success. That will be part of the ongoing work of the North/South Ministerial Council.

You mentioned other commemorations that are of huge significance because of their historical importance. They have not necessarily been dealt with in detail at the North/South Ministerial Council, but, in discussions between myself, the First Minister and the Taoiseach and others, there is a general acceptance that important commemorations that will be of great significance to the unionist community and to the nationalist/republican community are approaching. We have to ensure that we approach them all in a fashion that is consistent with the incredible transformation that has occurred in the North in recent times. We need to be very sensitive about that. We need to appreciate that these are important commemorations, and I hope that all of us can participate in and be proud of them.

As part of the ongoing City of Culture discussions, a big bid is being made by people in the north-west to get Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann to Derry in 2013. That would also be a huge change because it would be the first time that that event has been held in the North. I think that the discussions on the important upcoming commemorations have been very sensible thus far and have been conducted in a fashion that allows us to get the best possible results for our people.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas ar maidin. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. He referred to the A5: will he update us on both the A5 and A8 road schemes?

Mr M McGuinness: We took the opportunity of the plenary meeting to express our disappointment at the Irish Government's announcement that funding for the project was being deferred. We explained that having to revise our plans would have a major impact on the local construction industry. We noted that the Irish Government would now provide €25 million per annum towards the project in 2015 and 2016. That came out of a discussion that the First Minister and I had with Enda Kenny on the margins of President Higgins's inauguration. We told the Taoiseach that the A5 project was of great importance to the people of the north-west and would be of benefit to both jurisdictions. Development work had been going well, and £40 million has already been spent.

We noted the progress on the A5 and A8 projects and agreed that a payment of £3 million will be made by the Minister of Transport, Tourism and Sport to the Consolidated Fund in accordance with the agreed procedure. We reiterated the Executive's commitment to the project and noted that the Irish Government are also committed to delivering it, but on a longer timescale. The key agreement at the meeting was that the relevant Departments will now prepare a new funding and implementation plan for the projects for agreement at the next NSMC meeting in transport sectoral format, with endorsement at the next NSMC plenary meeting.

I encourage officials to work together creatively to see what improvements can be made to the A5, as some stretches are well below the standards required on such an important route.

Mr Eastwood: Minister Varadkar in Dublin said that he would like to see 'The Gathering' programme as an all-Ireland series of events. Can the deputy First Minister confirm that the Executive will support that?

Mr M McGuinness: Minister Varadkar raised the issue during the North/South Ministerial Council meeting. I think that the initiative came from a conference that was held in Phoenix Park some months ago. There may have been some misunderstanding at the meeting that it was part of a Clinton initiative, but it clearly was not. It is an Irish Government initiative. The challenge for us is to see how we can gain from that. Discussions will obviously take place between Departments North and South to explore what it entails and what it is about. Given that an effort is being made to encourage people to come to the South over the course of that important event, it represents a real opportunity for our Departments, particularly those involved in tourism, to see how we can gain from it. The best way to deal with that is for the Departments to meet and have a discussion to see how we can gain mutual benefit from it.

Mr Lunn: I thank the deputy First Minister for the statement. Back to the A5 again: I note the Irish Government's commitment to deliver that on a longer timescale. That is fair enough. Is there any indication of what their attitude would be if our Department decided to go ahead with the necessary upgrade, not just for part of the road? If we took a decision to go ahead and upgrade the existing road rather than go for a full dual carriageway, how would the Irish Government react to that? Do they have a commitment to that project as an alternative to the full dualling of the road?

Mr M McGuinness: Let us not forget the A8 in all of this. In relation to the development of our infrastructure in the east of Ireland, right up to Belfast, we have roads of top quality to deal with traffic that is heading off on ferries to mainland Europe. I suppose the most deficient aspect of that route is the route from Belfast to Larne. That is an important part of the project. Both the A5 and the A8 are flagship projects for the North/South Ministerial Council. I am not going to pre-empt the discussions that are taking place between the relevant Departments North and South. They have now been charged, as a result of the decision taken at the North/South Ministerial Council, to come forward with an implementation and funding plan.

It is hugely disappointing for all of us that we have seen the economic difficulties that the Irish Government are facing effectively impact on what is a flagship project for the North/South Ministerial Council. It was with every degree of seriousness that the First Minister and I spoke to Enda Kenny. During that meeting, he made it clear that they were prepared to put £25 million into 2015 and £25 million into 2016. Of course, we did not stop at that. We pursued him to consider how further contributions could be made and, just as importantly, to get an absolute commitment from the Irish Government that they are committed, over whatever time frame they can manage it, to the completion of the project.

From our perspective, we have to see the outcome of the work at departmental level. The North/South Ministerial Council in transport format will consider that, and whatever decisions they come to will have to be endorsed by the North/South Ministerial Council. It is hard to know what its approach will be. We will find out shortly. It is absolutely vital that it is progressed as quickly as possible and whatever

uncertainty is around the projects is removed, not least for the benefit of our construction industry. Major companies are sitting ready and waiting, and a lot of work was done on their involvement in the projects, which will take place in three stages. It is vital that we finish the work as quickly as possible and that people can see how we are moving forward. The commitment is still there. It is a commitment from our Executive and from the North/South Ministerial Council, and, until the Irish Government say differently, I am working on the basis that they are also committed to completing their side of the bargain.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I want to go back to the A5 again and the fact that the Irish Government had previously committed £400 million to road projects. The deputy First Minister has just stated that £50 million has been committed during 2015 and 2016. You mentioned commitment, but has any further finance been discussed or committed beyond that period? The £50 million seems to be a drop in the ocean in comparison with the £400 million that the Irish Government originally promised. We hear that there is commitment, but is there financial commitment? Have figures been discussed?

11.15 am

Mr M McGuinness: The answer to that is yes. There have been further discussions on that issue between me, the First Minister and the Taoiseach. We do not yet know the outcome of those discussions. You are right that the £50 million is only a small percentage of what was the Irish Government's overall commitment. The Taoiseach went on the record — at UCD, I think — just a few months prior to his Government's decision to say that he would honour the commitment to these flagship projects, namely the A5 and the A8. We are obviously conscious of the economic difficulties that his Government are going through. We hope that, as a result of the ongoing discussions between not just Departments but the First Minister, me and the Taoiseach, there will be a recognition that these are flagship projects for the North/South Ministerial Council, that they are hugely important infrastructural projects for the development of the north-west and that we need certainty in relation to time and funding.

Given that we met the Taoiseach only recently, I am sure that I speak for everyone in the House by taking this opportunity to extend all our sympathies and condolences to him on the death of his mother. I attended the funeral yesterday in County Mayo. At this sad time, we are all thinking about his loss, as well as the huge fiscal and economic challenges that he faces.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Like others, I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Minister, you said that the two Education Ministers were undertaking a survey of the sustainability of rural schools. I welcome that work, considering the issues facing education North and South. I would appreciate it if the Minister would give us a bit more detail on where that sits and the possible outcomes.

Mr M McGuinness: We had a discussion on rural primary schools. It came up as a result of a concern raised by Ruairí Quinn, the Minister for Education in the South, about the ability of children from the Protestant community

in rural areas to access education, given the particular circumstances.

The two Education Ministers told us about work that they are planning on the sustainability of rural primary schools in border regions. They intend to commission a survey to establish the current and future schooling capacity and need in border regions. That will include looking at the level of demand from parents and young people in choosing schools across the border. Officials are working on it, and the Ministers intend to discuss it again at the next NSMC sectoral meeting on education. The findings of the survey will help in taking forward possible changes to legislation that currently place border-based restrictions on cross-border admissions and school transport assistance.

Mr G Robinson: Does the deputy First Minister believe that there are further savings to be made on cross-border bodies?

Mr M McGuinness: Both Finance Ministers are very conscious of their responsibilities to ensure that resources are used properly. At the meeting, we welcomed mutually beneficial co-operation as long as it is practical and adds value. We are all keen to work together to make savings. We agreed that, if there is scope to make savings by working together, it is important to examine that potential. The radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin is a good example of what can be achieved through co-operation. It was recognised that Departments are best placed to identify how to avoid duplication.

The Irish Government would like to share services where there is overlap, and I understand that Finance Ministers are exchanging papers on that. We all recognise that that eminently makes sense. Where mutual benefit can be brought to our people, on the northern or southern side of the border, there is always a responsibility on us to look at how we can make further savings.

Mr Nesbitt: In paragraph 8, it says that the two Ministers will review the sustainability of rural primary schools in border areas. Does the Minister accept that there is a real danger that that process may compromise the integrity, authority and clarity of the viability audit already undertaken by the Department of Education of all schools in Northern Ireland, which is currently the only show in town?

Mr M McGuinness: I have no doubt that our Education Minister will factor all of that into his deliberations when carrying out the consideration of school provision in border areas.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that a couple of big capital projects, such as the Ulster canal and the A5, which both impact on my constituency, were discussed. I ask the deputy First Minister and the First Minister to continue to support those two big projects given their importance in respect of jobs and the wider infrastructure. Will the deputy First Minister update us on the relocation of Foras staff to Gweedore?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member has taken the opportunity to express her consideration — "concern" would be too strong a word — of the implications of the A5 and the development of the Ulster canal for the constituency. I have already reported on all of that, and those are all works in progress. There is no doubt whatsoever that we all recognise the importance of further development, which

can bring economic benefits in tourism and the attraction of foreign direct investment to different constituencies throughout the North, not least her own.

In relation to the Foras na Gaeilge issue of decentralisation to Gweedore, last week, as part of the South's public service reform plan, the Irish Government announced that they did not intend to complete phase two of the relocation of the North/South Language Body's staff to Gweedore. However, the NSMC took a decision in April 2006 that 30 staff posts at Foras na Gaeilge should be located in Gweedore. Of course, the Irish Government have the right to review their structures, but the decision has implications for North/South structures. The outcome of the last NSMC meeting was that full consultation between Ministers North and South must take place. The issue will be discussed at the next NSMC language sectoral meeting, scheduled to take place in February next year.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Minister acknowledges the difficult financial and economic climate and the fact that we are in a worsening recession, and I believe that we expect more bad news today from Westminster in relation to the Northern Ireland block grant. Does the deputy First Minister acknowledge and agree that the fact that we are five years on from St Andrews and the agreement around a review of the North/South arrangements represents a failure and that we have not grasped the opportunities that are presented and are achievable by strengthening and enhancing North/South bodies? Will he undertake to ensure that the findings will be published in 2012, given that the findings of the report from 2007 remain on a shelf in the First Minister and deputy First Minister's office?

Mr M McGuinness: At the plenary, we discussed the next steps under the St Andrews Agreement review. The terms of reference for the review are to examine objectively the efficiency and value for money of existing implementation bodies, to examine objectively the case for additional bodies and areas of co-operation within the NSMC, where mutual benefit will be derived, and to input into the work on the identification of a suitable substitute for the proposed lights agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.

To progress the first element of the review, we agreed that a number of proposals will be discussed at the next round of NSMC meetings in sectoral format, with a view to decisions being taken at the plenary meeting in June 2012. The proposals include recommendations specific to particular North/South bodies, including proposals for boards for certain bodies, which were made by a panel of experts and advisers to the review group. They also include outstanding corporate governance or accountability issues in the review of the body's financial memoranda, and that is under way.

It was also agreed that the Finance Departments, in consultation with sponsor Departments, will take forward a feasibility study of the potential for shared services to provide efficiency savings in the bodies and then report to a future NSMC meeting. A way forward on the other elements of the review was also agreed. That will include consultation in the Executive and in the Irish Government, discussions at the NSMC institutional meeting next spring and final proposals being agreed at the NSMC plenary meeting in June of next year. It was agreed that the full report of the

experts on and the advisers to the review group will be circulated for information to the North/South bodies and published on the NSMC website.

Mr Campbell: What relevance does the deputy First Minister think the Irish Republic's forthcoming term in the presidency of the EU Council might have for Northern Ireland? I ask that given the irrelevance of the deputy First Minister's attempted involvement in the recent Irish presidential election.

Mr M McGuinness: I think that that is called a cheap shot, but that is not unusual from Gregory. Obviously, the Irish presidency of the EU in 2013 was discussed at the meeting. No doubt it will offer opportunities for all of us. The presidency will come at a critical time in the negotiations on several important pieces of legislation. It is possible that Ireland will have the presidency at the conclusion of the reform of the common agricultural policy and structural funds, for instance. We have offered to assist the Irish Government in the preparations for the presidency. We have already placed one of our civil servants in the Irish Permanent Representation, and others may be placed in other Departments to boost specialist areas.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Officials from the NSMC have been charged with bringing forward a new funding and implementation plan for the A5 and the A8. Can he give us any sense of when they will report? Will Roads Service personnel be in a lead role, as they have been to date?

Mr M McGuinness: That is a matter for the Departments that have been charged with doing that, on foot of the work at the NSMC meeting, to consider. The role of Roads Service and those who are in the lead in the project will obviously factor into the deliberations that are taking place. We all understand the huge disappointment that there was at the time of the Irish Government's announcement that they were not able to fulfil their end of the bargain at this time. We must remember that, when the projects were agreed, it was agreed that the front-loading would be done by us in the first and second years and the Irish Government's financial commitment would come in the third and fourth years.

As I said, I will not pre-empt the outcome of those discussions, except to say that it was hugely significant that officials were charged, at the NSMC plenary meeting, with bringing forward an implementation and funding plan. I think that everyone takes great encouragement from that. In the aftermath of the Irish Government's initial statement on what they were able to provide, there was some temptation to think that the money would be spent elsewhere.

The media obviously had their field day with it. However, they have all been brought back to reality as a result of the North/South Ministerial Council's decision. We cannot forget that those are flagship projects for the North/South Ministerial Council. The responsibility now is not whether the projects will go ahead but how they will go ahead. That is why people have been charged with implementation and funding responsibilities.

11.30 am

You asked how long it will take. It has to be ready for the next sectoral meeting of transport Ministers and relevant Departments, and then for endorsement at the next

meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council. The work needs to be conducted as a matter of urgency. I know that, even as we speak, those deliberations are continuing in Departments.

Mr Beggs: The deputy First Minister referred to the offer of £50 million or approximately 5% of the necessary funds for the A5, which is the current plan. Does the deputy First Minister accept that £400 million is a very significant amount to have withdrawn and that there needs to be a re-examination of the affordability of any such project? Can he advise how certain we can be of the offer of £50 million, given that £400 million has been withdrawn? What is to stop the withdrawal of the £50 million?

Mr M McGuinness: The Irish Government have gone on the record and made it clear that £25 million will be available in 2015 and in 2016. Yes, I absolutely agree with the Member that it is hugely disappointing for all of us and for his constituency, because the A8 is also a flagship project along with the A5 coming out of the decisions taken at previous meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council. The challenge for all of us is to ensure that the commitments made at the North/South Ministerial Council to flagship projects are effectively brought to fruition. That is why the present deliberations are ongoing with a view to how we make that happen. As I said earlier, it is not a question of whether the projects will go ahead; it is a matter of how they will go ahead and how they will be funded. The Executive need to have certainty that the Irish Government are going to fulfil the other £350 million, which would be the balance of the £50 million, in the context of those projects going ahead. At the moment, our discussions are about getting certainty from the Irish Government that they are as totally and absolutely committed to the construction of the road as the Executive and the Assembly are.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. What plans are being made to remove from Northern Ireland illegally dumped waste and return it to the Republic of Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: I know that that subject has received much attention recently. I know that a lot of work has been done already and that there has been good co-operation on waste management and the very important task of removing illegally dumped waste. The removal of waste from a site at Ballymartin near Kilkeel has been completed, and work on a further site may start later this year. Plans are being made to deal with the remaining illegal waste sites. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has agreed a proposed timetable for future co-ordinated enforcement and actions and joint inspections next year. It is a work in progress, and progress certainly has been made.

Mr Byrne: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement, in particular his comments about the A5. I also support him in his expressions of sympathy to the Taoiseach on the death of his mother.

I welcome paragraphs 14 to 17, which refer to the A5, and I particularly welcome paragraph 15, which refers to the Executive's commitment to the project. Will dedicated officials be working urgently on the project to ensure that it can be implemented through a reprofiling or on a phased basis?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said earlier, this is being taken forward with the utmost seriousness. The North/South

Ministerial Council has charged the relevant Departments with bringing forward funding and an implementation plan. Therefore dedicated officials are working on the project, and all of us are anxious to see its outworking. The fact that the North/South Ministerial Council, the Irish Government and the Executive have recommitted to the project should bring a lot of comfort to people who were concerned that, perhaps, the project would have been lost as a result of the Irish Government's decision.

However, at the same time, in the course of our deliberations, it is very important that we get certainty from the Irish Government in relation to their fulfilling their end of the bargain. That is why, in the course of the deliberations between the relevant Departments, it is very important that the First Minister and I continue to engage with the Taoiseach to ensure that any future elaboration on the issue includes a definite commitment from the Irish Government to fulfil their end of the bargain. We are all conscious that although there will no doubt be some re-profiling of how the road will be constructed, it is important that the commitment will be implemented by any Government that follows the Kenny/Gilmore Administration. That is without, of course, presuming the outcome of the next general election in the South. Whatever agreement is made, it must commit future Governments in Dublin to the completion of the project, given that we now accept that the project will have to be re-profiled.

Mr Allister: We know from the media that, on the margins, there were discussions with Enda Kenny about the Republic's facilitation of the IRA's terrorist and genocide campaign. Although it is good to press the Republic about those matters, did no one think to ask you, deputy First Minister, what you know about them and what help you could give to solve those issues?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member knows quite well, and he has been a Member long enough to know, that questions must relate to the statement. I have to say that, on this occasion, your question has certainly grown legs. So I ask the Member to remain seated and we will move on. That ends questions on the statement from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I make this point of order with some regret. It has become a bit of a trend in the House that some Members opposite and Mr Allister are minded to make specific allegations about the Southern state and its party to the Northern conflict. Their allegations are very specific. Is it in order for someone to use his position in the House to make an entirely unfounded remark about another state? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I see this very much as the cut and thrust of debate on all these issues. This is about how Members should temper their language in presenting what they want to say, more than anything else. I see nothing wrong whatsoever when Members speak on particular motions, such as private Member's motions, on issues that the Member has alluded to because I see it very much as the cut and thrust of debate. However, when it comes to ministerial statements, it is vital that questions be asked specifically to the statement. On occasions, Members ask questions that grow legs about ministerial statements. I give some latitude to Members who go slightly outside the statement but come back to the original statement in asking

their questions. However, Mr Allister is totally out of order, and he knows that.

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On a similar point, is it right for the SDLP to make equally unfounded allegations against the British state, given that we all know the reality of the funding and the failure to extradite from the Irish Republic that led to the terrorist campaign ongoing in Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: Order. What I have already said applies. We really should move on. This is about the cut and thrust of debate in the Chamber. Let us move on.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages

Ms Ní Chuilín (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Speaker. With your permission, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the second British-Irish Council (BIC) ministerial meeting on indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages. This statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, who was the accompanying Minister.

I attended the meeting in Gweedore, County Donegal, on 11 November 2011. I represented the Executive as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, along with Jonathan Bell MLA, junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The Irish Government were represented by Dinny McGinley TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht affairs; the Scottish Government were represented by Alasdair Allan MSP, Minister for Learning and Skills; Guernsey was represented by Deputy Michael O'Hara, Minister of the Department of Culture and Leisure; Jersey by Mario Lundy, the director of education; and the Isle of Man by Stuart Dobson, the chief executive officer of the Department of Education and Children.

The British Government are represented on the British-Irish Council indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages group by Rt Hon Hugo Swire MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland. The Welsh Assembly Government, represented by the Welsh Language Board, takes the lead in BIC on indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages issues.

I will now present a summary of the issues that were discussed at the meeting on 11 November. Promoting the use of indigenous and minority languages in communities was recognised as a vital part of the promotion of minority languages and the safeguarding of their future. Ministers endorsed the findings of the conference held in Belfast in October 2010 that considered and shared good practice in the field of promoting language and culture in minority language communities. The Belfast conference was attended by practitioners and policymakers from all BIC member Administrations.

Ministers agreed that projects to support the use of indigenous and minority languages by young people, in families and in the wider community should be supported by Governments. Ministers also noted the importance of adopting a government-led strategy to promote the use of indigenous and minority languages, and they agreed to share best practice in the BIC when developing such strategies. Ministers commended the organisation of a seminar for practitioners working in the field of promoting the use of indigenous and minority languages among young people. The seminar, which preceded the ministerial meeting, offered an opportunity for Administrations to share best practice in the field and to further develop their strategies in that important aspect of language planning.

In response to a recommendation from the 2009 Jersey summit, the seminar was arranged in partnership with the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD), which is a pan-European network that encompasses constitutional, regional and smaller-state languages to promote linguistic

diversity in the context of a multilingual Europe. Ministers welcomed the opportunity for practitioners from BIC member Administrations to share experiences with European partners through the involvement of NPLD.

Ministers reviewed the work that has been achieved by the work stream since the previous ministerial meeting in 2006 and noted its positive contribution in ensuring that best practice is shared among member Administrations. Ministers considered and approved proposals for the future work programme of the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages working group. The group will continue with its work in the areas of education, young people, broadcasting and the economic impact of indigenous and minority languages. It was agreed that the group should revisit the field of legislation in the context of indigenous and minority languages. The group will also focus on two new areas, namely marketing and information technology, with a particular emphasis on social networking.

Ministers tasked the BIC working group with identifying further synergies with the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity to gain maximum leverage from public resources in that area, and they asked the group to evaluate the work that has been undertaken since 2006 and to consider how the outcomes can be disseminated to stakeholders.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Minister made reference in the statement to the fact that the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages working group would continue with its work in the areas of education, young people and broadcasting. Will she outline in some detail the group's work to date, the manner in which the work will continue and the budget that is allocated to that work?

11.45 am

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. We are actually getting an appraisal of the work done on this to date. It was mentioned that the work done since 2006 needs to be evaluated. From the meeting, this is a new concept, particularly the development of work around young people and social networking, primarily using things like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. It was discussed at the meeting prior to the formal BIC ministerial meeting, along with the usage of it. We are anticipating an evaluation of the work done since 2006 and an update report on progress, particularly in relation to information technology and with a focus on social networking. I assure the Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee that we will provide updates to the Committee when we get them.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline whether there are any plans to share the experiences of other members of the British-Irish Council in regard to language Acts and strategies?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. As outlined in the statement, that is the intention. There is and will be a focus on the legislative approach to languages, particularly around strategies and Acts. I spoke to the Welsh commissioner and the Scottish Minister about legislation around Acts and strategies to help to promote and to protect the languages of those respective countries.

Mr Swann: Minister, I note that the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages working group is going to revisit

the field of legislation in the context of indigenous and minority languages. Will the Minister give her assessment of the benefits of legislation that deals with indigenous and minority languages coterminously, rather than as single entities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am struggling with the Member's question. Legislation is not unionist or nationalist; it is for all. It is about the protection of languages. If I am getting the Member right, it is about how legislation will help to promote and to protect the status of the Irish language and Ulster Scots.

Mr Swann: It is legislation about —

Mr Speaker: Order. Let the Minister continue.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It will also strengthen the links North/South and, indeed, east-west. It is primarily about the protection of languages and of their status.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí go nuige seo. I thank the Minister for the responses so far.

An féidir leis an Aire rud éigin a chur in iúl dúinn? Déanann sí tagairt maidir le straitéis ó thaobh an dá Rialtas ar leathanach 2. An féidir léi eolas a roinnt linn maidir leis na straitéisí sin? Chomh maith leis sin, an féidir léi cur in iúl dúinn faoi na moltaí i dtaobh an chlár oibre i dtaobh na dteangacha is lú úsáid agus na Gaeilge, faoi mar atá luaite ar leathanach 3?

Will the Minister please give us some detail on the collaboration between both Governments in developing strategies for indigenous and minority languages? In her statement, she referred to proposals for the future work programme of the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages working group. Will she share some information about the progress that has been made on both those points?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member said "both Governments", but I am not too sure which Governments. I referred to the Scottish and Welsh Governments. If the Member is referring to how the language of those jurisdictions has been protected, I made that clear.

On the issue of the working group, we brought forward, for example, the Líofa initiative in September. All the member states were enthused and excited about that because they are all at different levels of development in protecting and developing their languages. That should form a part, so the lessons learned from us — good practice, things we could do better — will be shared. In addition, my primary focus and concern is the development of an Irish language Act and the two separate strategies. It will be one of those issues where each Administration shares progress on each development regarding the protection of languages. That information is collated and shared with each Administration, so we do not have to wait from one BIC meeting to the next to find out where good practice exists or what works and what does not.

I am not sure specifically what the first part of the Member's question referred to. If the Member were to write to me on that, I would be happy to answer.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her statement. I appreciate that there was a conference in Belfast in October 2010 and some sort of summit meeting in Jersey in 2009, but does

the Minister think that a ministerial meeting every five years is sufficient to give the subject the priority that it deserves? To satisfy my curiosity, will she also confirm which minority languages people are concerned about in Jersey and Guernsey?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Each of those Administrations is producing proposals for developing their language. Obviously, there are difficulties with that development, but each Administration that comes to the table is afforded the same respect. I will not get into which language the proposals relate to because that is not my business.

The Member's question was whether five years between meetings is too long. I cannot comment on what happened before I became Minister. However, I will say that I and each Administration have made a commitment to share information where possible. It is not acceptable to wait from one sectoral meeting to the next to share good practice. Representatives of each Administration at those meetings are genuinely enthusiastic about the development and protection of language and about ensuring that every language has equal status. I am happy to share any lessons that we can learn from the development of all that, and I accept that that is also the case for the other Administrations.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. In response to the question from my colleague Michelle McIlveen, the Minister stated that work carried out since 2006 was being evaluated. Why was an evaluation not carried out before? What is the timescale for the evaluation?

Ms Ní Chuilín: You need to ask the previous Minister about that. A unionist Minister was in this post — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to continue.

Ms Ní Chuilín: A unionist Minister was in this post from 2007, so you need to ask your colleagues why that did not happen. Under my watch, there will be an evaluation, and we will share that with the Committee. If you want to put in any specific questions in writing, either directly or through the Chairperson, I would be happy to respond.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. To date, what discussions have taken place on the Líofa 2015 campaign?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I outlined in response to an earlier question, I presented the Líofa initiative during a discussion on sharing initiatives that sit outside the commitments that Administrations and Governments have already made on language progress and protection. The smaller Administrations in particular were looking for ideas about how to encourage people to get involved in learning and development. I have to say that the enthusiasm for Líofa was obvious, and I intend, through this format and others, where possible, to ensure that the different Administrations are as aware of it as possible. Certainly, the smaller Administrations will come here to talk to people who have signed up for and will learn through Líofa. Indeed, they will talk to me and my Department about how they could possibly replicate it.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will have noticed on her trip to Gweedore that one way in which languages are promoted is through road signage. I am sure that she also noticed the signs in Wales and the promotion of Scots Gaelic in the

northern part of Scotland. What discussions took place to ensure the promotion of Irish on road signs here?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. For the record, I have not been to Wales or Scotland but I was in Gweedore and I did see the signs. My colleague Conor Murphy introduced bilingual signage and made sure that the Irish language was visible to road users. It is unfortunate that that did not continue. At the end of the day, this is part of the strategy and will be part of the Irish language Act. However, as Conor Murphy demonstrated, you do not need to wait until that happens before you do the right thing.

Mrs Hale: Will the Minister share with us any examples of best practice for developing strategies to promote the use of indigenous and minority languages that were raised at the meeting?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Best practice has been that the strategies have been brought forward. The Administrations have consulted extensively and have asked language groups and the wider community how those strategies need to be progressed in respect of what Governments should provide and how Governments are going to protect indigenous languages. I spoke to Minister of State Dinny McGinley TD, the Welsh Commissioner and Alasdair Allan MSP and they are looking to review and to evaluate their strategies to see that they are not just about value for money and effectiveness but are doing what they are supposed to, which is to protect and enhance the development of each language.

Committee Business

Department of Justice: Review of Initial Ministerial Provision

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

Mr Moutray (The Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (NIA 18/11-15) on its review of the initial ministerial provision in relation to the Department of Justice and the arrangements from 1 May 2012.

Members will be aware that the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 provided for the establishment of the Department of Justice and for the appointment of a Northern Ireland Minister to be in charge of that Department. The 2010 Act provides, at section 2(1), the terms of the appointment, setting out what is referred to as the initial ministerial provision. Schedule 1(8) to the Northern Ireland Act 2009 makes provision for the dissolution of the Department of Justice. It dissolves on 1 May 2012 unless, before that date, either the Assembly resolves, through cross-community support, that the Department is set to continue operating from 1 May 2012, or a second Act of the Assembly provides that the Department is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.

Members will be aware that this is sometimes referred to as the “sunset clause”. The House will recall that on 10 October 2011, the Assembly approved a motion under Standing Order 59(4) to refer to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee the matter of the review of the initial ministerial provision for the Department of Justice and to make recommendations relating to the provision that should exist from 1 May 2012. The Committee subsequently agreed its terms of reference for the review on that basis. Those terms of reference reflected that the timescale for the review would be extremely challenging in that they provided for the possibility that a second Act would be required by 1 May 2012.

The Committee agreed that the stakeholders for the review would be the Assembly’s political parties, an independent MLA, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Justice, including the respective Assembly Committees. All stakeholders were issued with a detailed stakeholder options paper, which set out possible options that specifically flow from the legislation that could be developed but may not necessarily be a practical or viable way forward.

Those questions sought views from stakeholders on the suitability and adequacy of the initial ministerial provision and the arrangements from 1 May 2012.

12.00 noon

I will summarise the stakeholder responses. In terms of the Justice Minister arrangements from 1 May 2012, the

Alliance Party favours that the Assembly resolves that the Department of Justice is to continue to operate from May 2012. The DUP described that option as “worthy of further consideration”. The Green Party, the SDLP and Sinn Féin favoured the option of a second Act under the Northern Ireland Act 2009 before 1 May 2012 to repeal the initial ministerial provision — with all Northern Ireland Ministers, including the Minister of Justice, losing office — and to fill those offices by the d’Hondt process. The DUP stated that that option was:

“worthy of further consideration...subject to a reduction in the number and reorganisation of departments”.

No stakeholders preferred any of the other three options. Those were that the Assembly resolves that the Department of Justice is to continue operating from 1 May 2012, with a subsequent Act; the introduction of an Act to dissolve the Department of Justice before 1 May 2012; and the do-nothing option.

Finally, a number of stakeholder responses from the DUP, the Green Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party raised the issue that the review of the ministerial arrangements in relation to the Department of Justice provides an opportunity to simultaneously review and reduce the number of Departments in Northern Ireland. Following its discussions on stakeholders’ views, the Committee agreed that, on the basis that there was no consensus on any of the options, the Committee would draft a report that outlines all of the options and summarises the consultation outcome in terms of who endorsed which options and why and any other comments.

Although the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) reached no consensus on recommendations to come out of the review, the report clearly highlights stakeholder-preferred options, some areas of agreement and some options that are unacceptable. The way forward is for the Assembly’s political parties to decide, through the First Minister, deputy First Minister and other party leaders. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee requests that the Assembly notes the Committee’s report, and I, as Chair, look forward to hearing Members’ contributions.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I offer my apologies. It was intended that I would make a winding-up speech, but I am unable to do that due to a family commitment. I thank the Committee Chair for his co-operation in agreeing to Raymond McCartney making the winding-up speech. I also thank the Chair for his work in compiling the report and the Assembly and Executive Review Committee officials for their diligence.

The transfer of policing and justice powers to the Assembly was accomplished after the Hillsborough agreement in February 2010 because there was sufficient cross-community confidence and support to do so. The initial provision for the appointment of a Minister of Justice was accepted as an interim agreement. However, Sinn Féin believes that, from May 2012, a Minister of Justice should be appointed on the basis of d’Hondt, as is every other local Minister. Therefore, we support option B3, as outlined on pages 59 and 60 of the report. By May of next year, we feel that the Department of Justice will be well bedded down and that it will, therefore, be time to treat the Justice Ministry in the same way as all the others.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Committee staff, Assembly research staff and legal staff who provided support and information during the Committee process. The report is rather unusual in that it does not contain any recommendation. Instead, it appears to me that the review and the bringing together of the report has simply enabled Members to acquire greater knowledge of the situation and the legal position behind the devolution of policing and justice and the views of individual political parties. I suspect that it will lend increased urgency to finding a solution before the May 2012 deadline occurs.

The legislation covering the Department of Justice is some of the most complex that I have come across. There are a number of relevant statutes, including the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, the Northern Ireland Act 2009 and the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, all of which inter-relate. That has been very difficult to understand, and the legal background and opinion were useful.

It is a very sensitive area, and it is important that we get things right, otherwise there will be unacceptable outcomes. There is the possibility that, if we hit that deadline with no proper means of giving authority to a Minister in place, there will be judicial reviews of decisions taken by accountable bodies. Accountable bodies, of course, include our police, our courts and our prisons. That situation could affect all those agencies and others. It appears to me that, without the accountability of those agencies to a Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly, there would be no legal authority to spend money or pay staff in our police, courts and prisons. That is incredibly serious, and it appears that new legislation would be required unless agreement is quickly reached. I would have thought that no sane person would have set up a system in that regard, so serious are those matters.

It is self-evident that, as we quickly approach the May 2012 sunset clause, which was agreed initially by the DUP and Sinn Féin when devolution took place, a fresh agreement is required. As we approach the deadline, we approach the end of the ministerial authority that resides with the Minister of Justice. It was not popular in 2010 to express concern about devolving policing and justice in the circumstances, because of the instability of the arrangements. Perhaps those who questioned the Ulster Unionist view at that time will see our concerns more clearly as the deadline approaches.

I expressed concern at the time that it would lead to political instability in the future. There is concern in the law-abiding community about the possibility of those who have been convicted of terrorist acts trying to rewrite history should they become a future Minister of Justice. In addition, it would be detrimental to politics in Northern Ireland in future were elections to become a case of, "Vote for us, or they become Minister of Justice". That would not be good for stability, and it would further polarise politics.

The Ulster Unionist Party's response has been that the sunset clause should not be dealt with in isolation. Instead, we should use this opportunity to restructure existing Departments and bring about efficiency savings. We have argued that there should be urgent inter-party discussions, which would reach a suitable political accommodation. Some favour simply the d'Hondt process, while others favour the continuation of the current arrangements. Both could result in the reshuffling of all ministerial Departments and the associated need for any new Ministers to reread into

new Departments, which would be wasteful and, perhaps, would limit the speed of the Assembly.

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

Mr Beggs: It is important as we go forward that we come to a sensible arrangement. The Committee's report simply provides a backdrop to the situation.

Mr McDevitt: The SDLP welcomed and, indeed, argued for many years for the devolution of policing and justice back into Irish hands. It was a matter of great regret that that devolution should take place on a fundamental inequality and that the political arrangements, which were arrived at in Hillsborough, should have created such an inequitable outcome.

The review offered the House the opportunity to move beyond an arrangement that is fundamentally unequal, arguably undemocratic, and undeniably contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, and to agree a model that could be based on some degree of equality, could acknowledge the spirit and the letter of the Good Friday Agreement and would be self-evidently more democratic. There is no democracy in our current system of mandatory coalition, which says that 25,500 votes gives the Alliance Party two seats at the Executive table, yet 94,000 votes gives my party only one seat or, indeed, 90,000 votes gives the Ulster Unionist Party only one seat. That disenfranchises — quite literally, by definition — 150,000 people. It says that their vote counts less and that they have less right to a say in the governance of the region. Why is that? It is because of an inequitable arrangement that was reached by Sinn Féin and the DUP to achieve the devolution of policing and justice.

On behalf of the SDLP, I entered discussions on the review with a clear determination to seek consensus that would undo that inequality, re-establish democratic principles at the heart of the House and return us to the spirit and the letter of the Good Friday Agreement. It is for that reason that I argued for option B3, which quite simply means that, at the end of April 2012, the Assembly would rerun d'Hondt for all Departments. Those parties that have a mandate and enough seats in the House to be entitled to one, two, three, four or five seats around the Executive table would be represented in accordance with their mandate. That is the fair, honourable and just option for which to argue, and I regret that we were unable to agree to it. The same argument will be made in political discussions, which will be convened by whomever and will take place wherever. I suggest to the entire House that it will be the test to which the people will hold us.

If the Assembly wants a system of government that is based on consensus, consociationalism and true power sharing, it must deliver a system of government that is self-evidently based on those principles, not one that is selectively so — that is, sometimes, except when it is not convenient, which is when it is done another way — and certainly not one that undermines the legitimate mandate of several parties in the House and inflates the mandate of others.

Therefore, in conclusion, to continue with the current arrangement would be the worst possible outcome. It would enshrine a fundamental inequality in the governance of the region. It would make the House and its arrangements synonymous with inequity, anti-power sharing, all the

principles that the Good Friday Agreement is not and all the words that the First Minister did not speak of in his conference speech. My appeal to colleagues is that, even though we could not arrive at agreement in the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, we must take the opportunity over the next few weeks to settle on the obvious solution, which is, for the time being, to do things in the way in which the people intended us to and, in 1998, voted for us to do, and that is to rerun d'Hondt for all Departments.

Mr Dickson: I am happy to support the motion and speak on the issue in the debate. The Alliance Party's overriding concern remains that justice powers are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. That is the single most important thing that the Assembly should seek to achieve out of the debate. The initial ministerial provision was probably the only suitable compromise that could be secured, given the concerns that existed at the time. I must say, however, that the current system has successfully provided for the devolution of justice to the Assembly and has shown a measure of confidence in the Minister of Justice, which cannot be demonstrated for other Ministers. That has been crucial, given the continued sensitivities around the administration of justice.

12.15 pm

Of the options available, the only one that we can proceed with must ensure the continued operation of that Department. It is vital that the Department of Justice remains in the hands of this Assembly. Devolution has provided for greater accountability and ownership and much better effective delivery than was ever available under direct rule.

I could go through all the options but, specifically, option B3 has been referred to, and I will comment on that as well. We would welcome option B3 if we believed that it could be properly implemented. However, even the exchanges in this Chamber over the past few months have demonstrated that the Assembly's approach to justice may not have matured sufficiently for that to be possible. Therefore, the Alliance Party is in favour of option A, which provides the best chance of maintaining the current level of public and political confidence in the office. While it is clear that there are anxieties around the devolution of justice, that option would continue to ensure that the Minister of Justice benefits from the confidence of a cross-community majority of MLAs, which is imperative given those anxieties. For that reason and those mentioned earlier, the Alliance Party's preference is for option A. You will also be aware, Mr Speaker, that the Minister has offered his resignation in those circumstances so that that matter may be put to the test as well.

Mr Hamilton: The report that is before the Assembly today once again highlights the valuable role that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee undertakes on behalf of the Assembly. We may not always be able to agree on an exact position as a Committee — this report is another example of that — but it shows the Committee's ability to scope out, on behalf of the Assembly, the positions of parties on issues that, to borrow the word that Mr Dickson used, often have great sensitivities surrounding them. So, the report outlines almost every party — I was about to say each party's position — in this Assembly's position on the assessment of the initial arrangements for the Department of Justice and what should take place after May 2012.

Before outlining the Democratic Unionist Party's position, I want to address another issue. I do not think that we need worry too much about the concern and anxiety and the nightmare scenario expressed by Roy Beggs because, as he pointed out, there is some sense of urgency to get this done in the time frame.

It is the view of the Democratic Unionist Party that the initial arrangements have worked satisfactorily. I do not want that to be seen as a particular endorsement of the incumbent Minister; I am talking about the structures in the context of the sensitivities surrounding the devolution of policing and justice. It is our view that the structures that were put in place very deliberately have worked satisfactorily to the extent that the hysteria predicted by some has not manifested itself. People will have noticed that, since the devolution of policing and justice, all hell has not broken loose and the ceiling has not collapsed in on us. We have shown the maturity to have policing and justice powers in our own hands even after all the issues that unfolded down through the years that made many believe that we could not administer those powers ourselves. So, those doom-laden predictions that were made by some have not come to pass, not least because of the painstaking negotiations in the early part of 2010 to put in place the very arrangements that are now in place.

However, that has created an anomaly — Mr McDevitt is correct to point it out — whereby the Alliance Party has two positions in the Executive. That is easily explained on the face of it by the fact that two different methods are used to elect those Ministers, but there is undoubtedly unfairness in that, and it ought to be addressed.

There are two options that the DUP believes are worthy of further consideration by parties. The first is the maintenance and continuation of the current arrangements, which is referred to in the report as option A.

The second option that the DUP believes is worthy of further consideration is referred to as option B3. It involves a second Act and the Minister of Justice being appointed via d'Hondt. We place upon that very strict and specific conditions involving the reduction and reorganisation of government Departments at Stormont. Mr Beggs has expressed his party's preference for a reduction in the number of Departments, and we welcome that his party has got in line behind the DUP's leadership on the issue. That is the strict and specific context in which we set our position that that option is worthy of further consideration.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he agree that that the public want a reduction in the number of Departments to make this place more efficient and that we should grasp the opportunity that is presented to us?

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

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his intervention. Even an added minute is not sufficient to explore fully the issue of reduction and reorganisation of Departments. It is safest to say that the Member is absolutely right in that, particularly at this time of severe constraint to public expenditure, wasting money on Departments that many of us will argue are unnecessary is an indulgence that Northern Ireland cannot afford. I hope that we will have opportunities to discuss that further and elaborate on it in the future. A reduction and reorganisation of government Departments

is the very strict context in which we set our position that option B3 is worthy of further consideration.

In conclusion, the AERC has completed its work and has drafted a compendium of parties' positions. That is useful to party leaders as they discuss the issue further and agree on a final way forward for the Department of Justice post-May 2012.

Mr Campbell: Each of the representatives who have spoken has outlined the nature of the AERC discussions. The Alliance Party representative made a relevant point regarding the Justice Minister himself. My colleague Mr Hamilton made the point that the functioning of the Department is distinct from the incumbent. Mr Speaker, you will be glad to hear that I will resist from going through the calamitous events in which the incumbent Justice Minister has engaged. That is distinct from the manifestation and outworking of the functions that we have agreed.

As Mr Hamilton outlined, the DUP's view is that a number of options are available. The general public would seriously question the Assembly's discussions if we were not to use every possible opportunity to look at the functioning of every Department in this place. Therefore, if we can agree a reduction in the number of Departments, we should. Members from the SDLP and the UUP commented about previous Administrations, but, given that those Administrations collapsed quite frequently, I do not exactly hold them up as any paragon of virtue of how Administrations should be run. Let us look at this with some sort of fresh perspective to see —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will give way.

Mr McDevitt: I seem to remember that, in a previous Administration, you were Minister for Regional Development. How many Executive meetings did you attend during your tenure as Minister for Regional Development?

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

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for that extra minute, of which I will not have to avail myself. I did not attend any, because I did not need to. The issue — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Campbell: Under the St Andrews Agreement, as we are finding out in a different context, no Minister can go off on a solo run, because changes have been made. We need to make further changes — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Campbell: — through the AERC. Hopefully, our report provides a sensible framework on which we can build to try to get an agreed structure. We all know about the sunset clause. Hopefully, Armageddon, which the honourable Member for East Antrim predicted, will not come about. I am out speaking to people all the time, and I do not hear them saying, "What are you going to do about the Department of Justice?" In fact, I have not heard it mentioned once since power was devolved, and there were those who predicted that all sorts of things were going to happen. They did not happen between now and then, no doubt they will not happen between now and May, and they should not happen post-May 2012.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the first item of business will be Question Time. This debate will resume after Question Time, when the first Member to speak will be Sandra Overend.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.25 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 7 and 15 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Government Estate: Energy Reduction Target

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he is taking to ensure that the energy reduction target of 10% over the 2011-15 period, as outlined in the government estate energy efficiency action plan, is achieved. (AQO 868/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): First of all, across the estate, we spend about £187 million on energy. Therefore, energy reduction is very important for us, both directly in the Civil Service and in the arm's-length bodies, such as the education and health organisations.

We have set a 10% energy reduction target for the parts of the estate that come under the Department of Finance and Personnel's control. We hope to achieve that by, first, reducing the footprint of the estate. Do we need to use all the buildings that we have, or can we consolidate into a smaller number of buildings? Secondly, we hope to achieve that by capital investment in energy efficiency measures, such as smart meters. Lastly, we hope to do that through behavioural changes in staff by simply encouraging people to use less energy in buildings, turn off lights and be more aware that, when they leave windows open and the heat goes out the window, it costs the public sector money.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Steven Agnew. Apologies, Anna. You still have a supplementary question to ask.

Ms Lo: It will not be too difficult a question for the Minister.

I welcome the work that is being carried out. The initial results of the pilot voltage optimisation project from the various Departments indicate that potential savings of 6% in electricity consumption are achievable. So, obviously, we need to double our efforts to work the savings up to 10%. Will the Minister advise us whether there is any particular area that he will look at to try to boost the savings by the extra 4%?

Mr Wilson: First of all, we have undertaken the pilot installation. That has been tried in three buildings: Ballymena County Hall, Clarence Court and Clare House. The predicted savings were estimated at between 5% and 13%, although the Member is quite right that the actual figure has been at the lower end.

The equipment that we installed will have payback periods of between two and a half and five years, which is a fairly low payback period. We now hope to install the equipment in seven further sites. However, it is worth noting that the Civil Service estate accounts for about only 6% of the total energy used. We have found that, in that part of the estate,

energy costs have been rising much less quickly than they have in the rest of the estate, which accounts for over 80% of energy use. In those areas, energy costs have been going up by about 40%.

Mr Agnew: What research has been done on the benefits of switching the government estate to renewable energy? I am sure that the Minister is committed to that from the point of view of reducing carbon, but would he agree that, as well as the reductions in carbon, there are savings to be made in the long term, in addition to the benefits of supporting the indigenous renewables industry?

Mr Wilson: The Member knows that I am very committed to reducing carbon and the carbon footprint of the Civil Service estate. I just indicated to him the ways in which we have done that. However, I must say that the Member's question requires a little more research. As he will know, energy from renewable sources, especially wind energy, which seems to be the main renewable source that we are promoting in Northern Ireland, is much more expensive than all the other sources of electricity. Let me give an example: the cost of energy from wind is around three and a half times more per unit than energy from gas. If, therefore, we are looking at ways of reducing energy consumption and bills, the one thing you certainly would not do is rely on a lot of the untested and expensive technology of renewable sources. I suspect that a far more effective way of getting energy costs down — we have to do this, given that we have a bill of nearly £200 million across the public sector in Northern Ireland — is to use energy more efficiently.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What discussions has the Minister had with ministerial colleagues on the issue? Are savings being made, or are attempts being made to save on the estates that he has referred to?

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel is responsible for the Civil Service estate, and, as I said, we have made efforts to cut costs there. We have set ourselves a target of 10%, and we compare favourably with other parts of the public sector.

On occasion, I have discussions with other Ministers about ways of investing to save. Indeed, many of the invest-to-save proposals that came forward during the Budget debate were around energy and the type of energy used in the public sector. Given that the payback period for many of these energy-saving methods is around two and a half to three years, it is probably better to finance them through invest-to-save schemes than through expensive, long-term capital commitments. There are ongoing discussions with Ministers around the invest-to-save agenda so that we cut down on this important aspect of cost to the public service.

Business Premises: Strangford

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many business premises in the Strangford constituency are vacant. (AQO 869/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information on the number of businesses in the Strangford constituency that are vacant is not available as data is collected at district council and ward level only. As of 20 November, there were 582, 252 and 596 non-domestic properties recorded as vacant in the Ards, Castlereagh and

Down council areas respectively. I understand that all of those will not be in the Strangford constituency, but those are the nearest figures I can give the Member.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for that information. I wonder whether he will join me in celebrating the fact that a long-term vacant property in South Street in Newtownards has now been rented and revitalised as a vibrant Ulster Unionist advice centre. There is, obviously, a downside, in that, presumably, the DUP has lost one of its advice centres elsewhere in the constituency.

As the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium endorses the need for a small business rate relief scheme, just not the one that he is proposing —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Could we have a question, please?

Mr Nesbitt: — does the Minister feel that there is a danger that he might pluck defeat from the jaws of victory?

Mr Wilson: I do not know whether the position of this vibrant Ulster Unionist Party office that has now opened in South Street was strategically chosen to benefit from the even heavier footfall that goes into the Alliance Party office next door; maybe time will tell. Mr McCarthy is not here today to verify that.

The small business rate relief scheme is an essential component of what the Executive are trying to do to revitalise a particular sector of our economy that has fared very badly during the recession. The fact that it has had widespread support is an indication that it is a scheme that will be effective. Of course, there have been detractors, but many of those who have criticised it have done so for purely selfish reasons.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This is in no way a reference to the Ulster Unionist constituency office, but has the Minister considered 100% rate relief on vacant properties, given the current economic circumstances?

Mr Wilson: I have not, but I will tell you what we have done. Many of those who responded to the consultation indicated that we should try to find ways of putting vacant properties to some use. The suggestion has been made that, instead of immediately charging people the full rate if they take over vacant properties, the 50% rate relief should be extended for a period to give them an incentive to take over vacant properties. That is something that I am looking at positively, although it will be for the Executive to decide when we present the final paper to them. However, it could have a dramatic impact by bringing vacant properties into use by reducing the overheads for new businesses, at least at first.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I noticed over the weekend that the Minister has taken to wearing dark glasses. Indeed, I would seek some form of disguise if I was presiding over a Department with a rate debt of £150 million. Will the Minister swap his dark glasses for rose-tinted ones and tell us what serious proposals he has to reduce that debt?

Mr Wilson: I assure you that I do not need dark glasses here today, because there are not many bright, shining lights coming from that side of the Chamber. The Member raises an important point, but I would like to see some consistency,

not only from members of his party but from members of other parties. Of course we have to pursue those who do not pay the rightful tax that the Assembly has agreed to levy. However, there is always a balance to be struck. In times of economic difficulty, do we pursue those who have not been able to pay their rates to the ultimate, taking them to court, bankrupting them and putting them out of business? I guarantee that, if we were to pursue the draconian line implicit in the Member's question, he would be here today criticising me for putting people on the dole.

I hope that the Member understands that the issue is complex and there is a balance to be struck. We will pursue those who do not pay their rates. Equally, however, we must recognise that, in difficult economic climates, some people refuse to pay their rates — we go after those — but there are some who cannot pay their rates. It is a balance, and we have to make a judgement. Moreover, even though we are in a recession, we have actually reduced the rate debt burden, which indicates that we are pursuing those people rigorously, but we have to have sensitivity and a sense of balance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in her place to ask question 3.

A5 Road Project: Funding

4. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with other Ministers about the effects of the Irish Government's delay in contributing to the A5 project. (AQO 871/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have provided a full update to ministerial colleagues regarding the funding of the A5 project. The Executive are now considering the implications of the Irish Republic's decision to defer and reduce its contribution to the A5 project. We will consider how the remaining funding is reallocated.

Mr Eastwood: Given that we are just getting some of the details of today's autumn statement, will the Minister give us an assurance that there will be no negative impact on capital spend in the North as a result?

2.15 pm

Mr Wilson: I assume that the Member is speaking about Northern Ireland. Early indications are that, as a result of the additional capital funding that will be made available, the Northern Ireland Budget should benefit to the tune of about £130 million over the next three years. We hope that there will also be some positive consequences for current spending. We are not exactly sure of the increases that there will be; they will probably be fairly small. However, at least our worst fears about a big reduction in current spending but not a great reduction in capital spending do not seem to have come to the fore.

Mr Murphy: The Minister will be aware of the importance that was attached to the project by the entire Executive in the North/South Ministerial Council meetings. It was important in respect of economic regeneration for the north-west, which straddles both jurisdictions, and the construction industry, which would have carried out the building work for the project. How much discussion has he had with the Minister for Finance in the South to ensure that

whatever commitment is there is held to and to argue for a greater commitment in that time frame to secure as much of the project as possible, given the obvious benefits attached to it?

Mr Wilson: The Member has hit the nail on the head: it is a project that straddles Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. It benefits both jurisdictions, which is why it was the case in the first instance and why it must remain the case that the project will have to be jointly funded. It would be totally unreasonable to expect Northern Ireland to carry the total burden for a project that will have equal benefits for the two countries on this island.

I had discussions with the Finance Minister in the Republic before the decision was made. I emphasised to him the importance that we attached to the scheme and to the joint funding of the scheme. Since the decision was announced, I have had two meetings with the Republic's Finance Minister. The First Minister and deputy First Minister had a separate meeting with him. In those meetings, we indicated that, if the scheme is to progress, we expect a commitment from the Government of the Irish Republic. The sooner that commitment can be made, the sooner we can make decisions about the level of spend and the type of project that it will be. So far, there has been a commitment of £50 million. Although it is outside the Assembly's current Budget period, we will seek to firm that up and, of course, get a greater commitment. However, the size of the commitment will depend on the amount of work that can be done.

Mr Girvan: Will the Minister confirm whether the A8 project will go ahead as planned, or will this announcement do the same for it as happened with the A5?

Mr Wilson: The decision on what will be done with the capital money in the Roads Service budget and on what reallocations of that money there might be as a result of the Irish Government's decision not to fully fund the A5 will be taken by the Executive on the basis of the decisions and priorities set by the Minister for Regional Development. It is not for me to decide the Department for Regional Development's (DRD) priorities for whatever money remains in the roads budget after we decide how the money is to be allocated.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister advise on the Assembly's financial provision for this project and its planned phasing over the next four years?

Mr Wilson: I did not quite hear the first part of the sentence, but I think that the Member asked what the revised programme is likely to be.

We have had no clear commitment from the Government of the Irish Republic on any money over the Budget period for which we have allocated funding. Since we have not decided how much of the funds will remain with DRD, the Minister for Regional Development will not be in a position to make a judgement. At the end of the day, it will be his decision which parts of the road scheme, if any, go ahead and what the timing of that will be. However, as I said in answer to an earlier question, it is my view — indeed, it was implicit in the question — that, since this is a joint project and will benefit both parts of the island, it should be jointly funded. Until we are certain of what joint funding there is, it will be difficult to make decisions about phasing, timing and what parts of the road will be done.

INTERREG IVa

5. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he can confirm that all of the €70 million of INTERREG IVa funding has been allocated to projects and that there is no risk of moneys being returned to Europe. (AQO 872/11-15)

Mr Wilson: INTERREG IVa has a total budget of £233 million, and, to date, it has approved 64 projects, which are worth approximately £164 million. That represents 71% of the programme budget and leaves a balance of approximately £68 million to be allocated.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is currently processing 19 applications, and it is expected that those will have been fully assessed by early 2012. After that, there will be further calls for the remaining programme budget to be allocated. The current forecast is that, when the successful projects have been approved, INTERREG IVa will have between £35 million and £55 million left to allocate. If the programme fails to meet its EU targets, the shortfall is deducted from the budget, and that is one situation that we want to avoid. However, I must say that I am somewhat alarmed that, at this stage, we are being told that between £35 million and £55 million may be at risk.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his frank reply. Has he given any consideration to approving schemes on a reserve list, so that, if a scheme is knocked out of the project for any reason, there is at least something else that is approved and ready to be included, to avoid any money being sent back?

Mr Wilson: I would prefer SEUPB to do its job and allocate money to the areas where we expect money to be spent. I do not want to find that we simply use that money to finance projects that would be financed in the normal run of events anyway. It is meant to be additional money, and it is meant to have an additional impact on the Northern Ireland economy. For that reason, I will press SEUPB to ensure that it gets projects assessed quickly, follows up to make sure that the money for those projects is spent and, where there are difficulties, gives advice to the applicants so that quality projects can be brought forward.

Mr Campbell: For comparison purposes, could the Minister outline what the Peace III programme commitment and spend was in relation to INTERREG IVa?

Mr Wilson: The Peace III programme is meeting all its spending targets. I do not know the figure for Peace III off the top of my head, and I do not want to mislead the Member regarding the exact amount of money, so I will write to him and give him the total amount of money that has been spent to date.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister made any recommendations on how to speed up grant allocations?

Mr Wilson: We have made some recommendations. I have asked SEUPB about the reason for the delay, and it has said that sometimes its economists do an assessment of a project and then it goes to departmental economists for their approval. Those two things running in sequence lengthen the time taken. We now have a parallel process whereby the economists from the SEUPB and the sponsor

Department will look at the project together early on so that there should not be that duplication of work. Hopefully, that will speed up the process.

The other thing that I have been saying to the SEUPB is that, if we are not getting quality projects coming forward or if they are being brought forward and the SEUPB is having to hold them back because it needs more information, it should talk to the applicants at an early stage and tell them what it expects to see. Those are simple things that need to be done, and they are ways in which we can minimise the risk of underspend.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr William Humphrey.

Mr Humphrey: Can I ask Roy Orbison, sorry, the Minister, if he could confirm that, having had meetings in recent times and as the Committee has had discussions with the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA), the Federation of Small Businesses and the large retailer organisations — sorry, can I ask question 6?

6. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the benefits that the small business rate relief scheme will deliver. (AQO 873/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Now that I know his supplementary, I will answer that as well. The small business rate relief scheme was introduced in 2010, and it was to help support small businesses during the economic downturn. Since then, the Executive have agreed to extend it. The intention is to double the number of businesses that will benefit from the relief. So far, those who have benefited have indicated that it has had an impact. No formal evaluation has been done because the scheme has been in place for only one year. However, in light of the positive reaction that there has been, I have no doubt that small businesses see it as an important lifeline at this time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Does the Member wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Humphrey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your perseverance. Given his discussions today with the city centre management in Belfast and the Chamber of Commerce, does the Minister believe that he can do more to help our capital city in the difficult times that traders in Belfast face in the run-up to Christmas and, of course, the new year?

Mr Wilson: One has to look at the whole Programme for Government; the small business rate relief; the freezing of the regional rate; the amount of money that has been spent in Belfast city centre; the vast amounts of money that have been spent on improving the environment in the city centre; and, of course, the activities in which the Executive have been involved in promoting Northern Ireland. Specifically, that has helped Belfast with the likes of the MTV awards. Next year is the centenary of the Titanic and the signing of the Ulster covenant, and there will be events around those. A vast amount of money has gone into helping the capital city. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has indicated that, between now and 2020, she hopes to increase visitor numbers to Northern Ireland to 3.5 million,

with an extra spend of £625 million. Much of that will go into the greater Belfast area.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How many additional businesses will be included in the scheme?

Mr Wilson: As a result of the scheme, we hope to double the number of businesses to be affected by small business rate relief. That will be about 9,000 businesses.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his efforts to help small retail businesses. Has he any further proposals for schemes that might help provincial towns, which are suffering severely from the retail downturn? Does the Minister expect any benefits to come as a result of the Chancellor's statement today, particularly in relation to businesses?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should ask only one supplementary question.

Mr Wilson: First, as far as small provincial towns are concerned, my Department is dealing mainly with issues relating to rates. There is the small business rate relief scheme, plus the things that are attached to that, such as the 50% relief for first year occupation of vacant premises etc. They will have an impact on many of the small provincial towns. Through DSD, more money is being allocated to urban regeneration and town regeneration master plans etc. That will also have an important regenerative impact. We hope that today's statement will have a net impact on the Northern Ireland Budget over the next year in capital spend of about £130 million.

2.30 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1, 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

Primary Care Centres

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department intends to take forward a capital programme for primary care centres. (AQO 884/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am committed to investing in primary care to make the health service more effective and to allow me to move patient care from the acute to the primary care sector. In the current economic climate, my capital budget is not sufficient to allow me to progress all the capital projects that I would like to. Therefore, I have tasked my officials with examining alternative sources of funding to supplement the projects that I can progress through the capital budget to enable me to progress a range of primary care centres across Northern Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer and an earlier indication that he will be creative and innovative in finding capital money for primary care centres. Will he take into account the distance of patients from the nearest acute service

hospital when prioritising primary care centres where much of the healthcare will be delivered? Obviously in west Tyrone terms, places such as Carrickmore are very disadvantaged because they are most distant from an acute hospital —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member knows that we must have one question.

Mr Poots: Thankfully, patients in Carrickmore do not always require treatment when they are in Carrickmore. Sometimes Ballygawley would be more requiring. Nonetheless, it is important that we provide as much care in the primary care sector as possible. That is why I am looking at alternative methods of procuring those facilities. I have established a board in my Department, which includes members of the Strategic Investment Board, my staff and Mr Compton from the Health and Social Care Board, to ensure that we can move this forward.

Mr Beggs: Is the Minister aware of the urgent need to upgrade the health and care centres in Carrickfergus and Larne, given, in particular, the substandard nature of both those premises and the need for appropriate space so that medical professionals do not have to operate in cramped conditions?

Mr Poots: I have to be honest: I am less concerned about the nature of how the Member describes it. I do not want glorified health centres or excellent facilities for people to operate out of. I want facilities that will make a real transformational difference to the healthcare system that will help me to shift care from the secondary sector to the primary care sector. I am looking for facilities where GPs will be in operation with allied health professionals and social services, with diagnostics available so that the elderly person with a chest problem can get it dealt with at a local level and reduce the number of people who have to go into hospital, with all the risks that that brings, particularly to older and vulnerable people.

Mr Eastwood: Does the Minister recognise the cash savings and the potential for reducing waiting times should minor procedures be carried out by GPs in primary care facilities in the community rather than in hospitals?

Mr Poots: Yes, I do. Hopefully, when we have a report on the way forward for the health service, the individuals who draw up that report will reflect a similar consideration.

Kinship Care

3. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the level of kinship care currently provided. (AQO 885/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are, essentially, two types of kinship care: formal kinship care and informal kinship care. Formal kinship care involves children being placed in care with either family or friends, with the placement being assessed by social services in health and social care trusts and in accordance with what the law requires. Informal kinship care is the care of children by family in circumstances where a child is unable, for whatever reason, to live with his or her birth parent or parents. In the main, unless child protection issues are referred to them, children's social services have no role in approving the care of those children because the extended family of the child has chosen not to involve the

state in the care of their kin. I emphasise that that is their prerogative. They are not required to involve the state, and, in many cases, they choose not to do so.

At 31 March 2011, there were 717 children in kinship foster care in Northern Ireland, 336 boys and 381 girls. Those formal arrangements require the approval of social services, and records are kept of assessments, reviews and social work visits. However, if children are being looked after through an informal kinship care arrangement, social services will generally not have any involvement with them, and they will, therefore, not appear in official statistics.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for a very full answer. Does he agree that, in some ways, those providing kinship care may be seen as saving the state very many millions of pounds, and is it right that some of them are disadvantaged when they reach the state pension age by the suspension and withdrawal of certain benefits? Can he estimate the amount of money that his Department would have to spend to provide those services if kinship care were not available?

Mr Poots: Having children in the care of their families is hugely preferable. As is indicated, this is not something that we shy away from, and we provide that type of care for 717 children whose families are caring for them. Those are children who were at risk. If, for other reasons, children are unable to stay in their own home and other members of the family take care of them, where those children are not at risk, it is a different matter, and, therefore, there is not the same opportunity for us to become engaged to the same extent. We fundamentally seek to look after children at risk, and I assure the Member that there are many children at risk. That there are 717 children in kinship care, plus many, many others who are in foster care or in homes, is an indication of that fact.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they may each ask only one supplementary question.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Chief Social Services Officer indicated to the Minister whether there are any problems with payments to kinship carers throughout all five social care trusts?

Mr Poots: I am not aware of any. The Chief Social Services Officer has not made me aware of any problems, although that is not to say that there are none. We try to make the system as supportive of the children in the first instance, and to those families in which we have had to intervene, we give sufficient support to ensure that the children can be cared for.

Let us be honest. We really do not want to have children kept in residential care for two reasons: the outcomes are considerably poorer; and the costs are prohibitive. Therefore, let us look for the option that delivers the best outcomes. If it saves money along the way, all the better, but let us look for the best outcomes at all times.

Ms Lewis: What progress has been made in developing kinship foster care standards?

Mr Poots: We have to be very clear about the standards that are set. We will uphold standards that ensure that children are well looked after, receive full appropriate care and be in a place of safety at all times. A lot of those children come from backgrounds where they have been in very dangerous

and vulnerable situations. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to get them the maximum amount of protection and safety and the appropriate care at all times.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that questions 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

NHS: Winter Weather

6. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions the health service has taken to prepare for another potentially harsh winter. (AQO 888/11-15)

Mr Poots: The health service worked effectively last year to ensure that services were maintained throughout the winter. Following those difficult and challenging events, as best practice, trusts and other health and social care (HSC) organisations took the opportunity to review their plans in the light of that response. Consequently, all HSC organisations have enhanced their plans, where appropriate, in advance of this winter to ensure that they meet the needs of people who receive health and social care services. In addition, funding has been made available to trusts to improve the resilience of health estates. Each HSC organisation also participated in an HSC winter-planning workshop on 24 October and tested its response plans in a cross-government severe weather exercise on 22 November.

That included testing improved arrangements for identifying vulnerable people during a prolonged spell of harsh weather. The assessment of their needs will be kept at the forefront of response arrangements. If required, key public health messages will be reinforced throughout the winter.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his full response to that question. Given the potential for severe cold weather this winter, have specific measures been considered that will take account of the most vulnerable people in our society, including the young and the elderly?

Mr Poots: That is certainly a valid question. We have drawn up a checklist to assist in the identification of people who are or might become vulnerable in an emergency. We have also held multi-agency meetings, and the assessment of the needs of vulnerable people is a starting agenda item. That will ensure that there is early identification of specific vulnerable groups as well as monitoring how an evolving incident may impact on other groups and cause them to become vulnerable, which will enable appropriate action to be taken at each stage of the emergency to address their needs.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. If the winter turns out to be less harsh than last year's, as experts are now predicting, how quickly can the Minister redeploy any money that is saved? What projects are likely to benefit from that money?

Mr Poots: The experts did not predict last year's harsh winter. In fact, they predicted that we would have a warm and wet winter. I will wait and see what the good Lord sends us. I trust that it will not be as cold as last year. If that results in savings, there are plenty of areas in which we could spend money. Towards the end of the year, we try to buy in more operations and reduce the waiting lists for cardiac care, orthopaedics, and so forth. There will be ample opportunities to spend any money that happens to exist. At

the minute, our total budget is around £15 million short. We hope to make that up over the next number of months. If we get a warm and wet winter, I am quite confident that we will be able to spend all of the resources that are available to us.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. I have contacted him recently about possibly using part of the social protection fund to give winter fuel payments to those who are terminally ill, including approximately 600 cancer patients and 300 other people with terminal illnesses. Will the Minister give us an update on that?

Mr Poots: We are having ongoing consultation about that with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). I know how keen OFMDFM and its Ministers are for us to support some very vulnerable people throughout the winter. It is a very worthy idea. If we can facilitate that with some fairness, we will certainly do that. It is quite challenging to identify those who are most in need without excluding others who are in genuine need. That is one of the challenges that face us, but we are wholly sympathetic to that notion.

Obesity

7. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to tackle obesity. (AQO 889/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department established the obesity prevention steering group to oversee and drive forward the Fit Futures implementation plan, which aims to prevent obesity among our children and young people. More recently, that group has led the development of A Fitter Future for All, which is a cross-government strategic framework to prevent and address obesity across the life course in Northern Ireland. The framework will incorporate action on food and nutrition and physical activity to tackle overweight and obesity issues throughout the population.

I anticipate that the framework will be issued in the near future, subject to final agreement from the Executive. The draft Programme for Government, which is currently out for consultation, commits us to investing £7.2 million on the framework over the next three years. The Public Health Agency (PHA) is currently addressing obesity through programmes that encourage physical activity and provide information and support to eat healthily. The Public Health Agency has actively supported the development of the framework and will play a key role in its implementation.

2.45 pm

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. What value does he place on behaviour-changing programmes such as the Motivate programme being run by the Northern Trust?

Mr Poots: I had the opportunity, through the Member, to meet those behind the Motivate programme, which has delivered real and significant change. We will, therefore, ask the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and the Public Health Agency to look at that to see whether it can be developed and rolled out further.

The challenge of tackling obesity is huge. If people do not change their lifestyles, obesity will cause huge damage to their health outcomes, which, in turn, will cost the public purse massive amounts of money. People with that lifestyle really need to change it and challenge their behaviour. I should say that smoking, excessive drinking, overeating and sitting on the couch are all part of an overrated lifestyle that considerably shortens one's life.

Mr Agnew: Given the importance of diet to health, what work is being done by the Department to promote healthy eating, including the provision of quality food in hospitals to help to aid recovery?

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency is responsible for that. However, my Department has developed A Fitter Future for All, which is an obesity prevention framework for Northern Ireland 2012-2022 that we will publish in the near future. Previous to that, the Department participated in the physical activity guidance editorial group, which developed the UK-wide CMOs' physical activity guidelines, 'Start Active, Stay Active'. We have also been working with the Food Standards Agency on food labelling, providing calorie information on food menus, reformulation, etc. The Department remains a member of the Food Access Network and is working with the Institute of Public Health in Ireland on increasing awareness of health impact assessments.

Let me nail the lie sometimes promoted on radio stations that bad food is cheaper for families in need: buying low-cost heavily processed foods, be they pizzas, burgers or whatever, from local stores is not as cost-effective as buying fresh vegetables and some of the cheaper cuts of meat. We need to encourage people to cook properly and to provide nutritious meals for their families as opposed to buying a couple of items from the local store and popping them in the microwave, because that will not provide proper sustenance or nutrition.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us whether there are any plans to take more definite action on bulimia and anorexia.

Mr Poots: The definite actions that will come through in the new obesity strategy will obviously be aided by the £7.2 million that we have identified and dedicated to that strategy. It is fairly clear that this is not just aspirational but something in which we intend to invest to ensure that we deliver the results required.

Health Inequalities: West Belfast

8. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to tackle health inequalities in west Belfast. (AQO 890/11-15)

Mr Poots: The needs of west Belfast are significant in complexity and volume. The area represents some of the most socially deprived areas in Northern Ireland and has significant levels of long-term unemployment, low educational achievement and poor health.

Tackling health inequalities goes hand in hand with addressing the socio-economic circumstances that prevail in and affect people's lives. The PHA's health and social well-being improvement teams work in close partnership

with the West Belfast Partnership, Colin Neighbourhood Partnership and other stakeholders to identify and address health inequalities in the west Belfast area. Significant time in the past year has been spent by partners engaging with the respective communities throughout the area to identify priorities for the investment effort.

A number of targeted programmes and initiatives are under way or are planned through a range of contracts with community and voluntary organisations. Those will focus on, for example, mental health and emotional well-being and cardiovascular disease in the Belfast commissioning group area, as well as on supporting families through early years, suicide prevention and awareness, and drug and alcohol misuse in the Colin area.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer and for seeing that social and economic inequalities are linked to health. How concerned is the Minister that the life expectancy of someone from West Belfast is six years fewer than those who are from South Belfast, which is just a couple of miles away? What discussions has the Minister had with his Executive colleagues to make West Belfast a special case and to introduce a scheme that would tackle those inequalities?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, one question please.

Ms J McCann: Sorry.

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. West Belfast reflects many other working-class areas, and we need to challenge the fact that people are not living as long. Many of those people make considerably more visits to hospitals and health centres throughout their lives, which indicates that they need to make lifestyle choices and that work needs to be done from the earliest point in young people's lives to educate them properly and appropriately on how they can lead healthier lifestyles.

The six or seven years' difference in life expectancy is not an accident. It is largely the result of people leading lifestyles in which they eat poor quality foods that are highly processed, high in fat and very sugary. They also do not take the exercise that they should, and many smoke and drink heavily. All those things impact on people's lives. We are prepared to work with the community to educate it, and we will put more money into the public health agenda to ensure that that education process continues.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer, which was very interesting. It focused on public health issues, and my constituency of North Belfast has similar problems. Will the Minister reassure people and the House that he will continue his good work in that respect? Will he avail himself of other programmes such as Supporting People and neighbourhood renewal to bring home the good work that is being done in public health?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. In west Belfast, for example, 46% of mothers smoke during pregnancy, compared with the average rate of 11%. Combating that is a challenge, and that is work for the Public Health Agency. It is also evident that 50% of smokers will die as a result of smoking: that is one in every two. That is also a challenge for the Public Health Agency, as are obesity and excessive drinking. All those things and all those messages need to be kept in the public domain,

and even if it bores, irritates and annoys people, we need to keep pumping those messages out. Some people are not receiving those messages as well as they should, so they are continuing with lifestyles that are hugely damaging to their health and consequently creating a considerable amount of work for us.

Mr Campbell: I commend the Minister for his informative and concise answers. Some of his Executive colleagues should take a leaf out of his book; that might help us to get down the Order Paper.

Mr D Bradley: Which ones?

Mr Campbell: Does anyone want me to answer that? There might be a few embarrassed faces around the Chamber.

Does the Minister expect the draft Programme for Government to assist with tackling health inequalities in the next two years?

Mr Poots: I do. For example, in the Western Trust, we have introduced the Family Nurse Partnership. I was in the city of Londonderry recently, where I met with young mothers. A good start to life is hugely important, and it can make such a difference. I am certainly prepared to work closely on that with my colleagues in the Department of Education and the junior Ministers in OFMDFM and to make interventions at an early point so that children can get the right start in life and be put on the right educational foundations.

I believe that we can make a difference over a generation. There is a course of work for us to do immediately as well, and it will be about getting messages to adults. However, if we really want to make a difference, we need to get to the children, and that is a course of work that we will need to do.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his earlier replies. Tackling health inequalities is a very important issue. Does the Minister feel that in trying to close the gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged areas there are particular targets he would envisage setting to help reduce the differences?

Mr Poots: At the minute, the difference is 7.7 years for males and 4.6 years for females. From 2007 to 2009, male life expectancy reached 76.8 years, which represented a 1.2 year increase over 2001-03, and female life expectancy increased by 0.9 years to 81.4 years. That is what is possible and achievable. It will not happen next year or in the following year, but in a decade you can make a difference, and in a generation you can make a considerable difference. Thereafter, there is no particular reason why you cannot close the gap.

Cardiovascular Disease

9. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assessment of the cardiovascular disease risks to vulnerable people, given the high levels of fuel poverty that they experience. (AQO 891/11-15)

Mr Poots: Lower temperatures have a negative impact on health and well-being. Direct impacts are increased morbidity and a higher risk of mortality. Living in cold homes can also exacerbate many conditions, including circulatory illnesses such as cardiovascular disease; delay recovery

from serious illness; and adversely affect mental health and well-being.

My Department is working with other Departments and partners in the statutory, private, voluntary and community sectors to address fuel poverty and its impacts on health. The Public Health Agency is actively driving forward a number of initiatives to support the fuel poverty strategy, Warmer Healthier Homes, launched by the Department for Social Development in March 2011 to target vulnerable households that are most in need of help.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer. He may have dealt with this point in his answer, but will he elaborate a bit on the priority for fuel poverty on which his Department is dealing with other Departments? I appreciate that this is a multi-departmental difficulty.

Mr Poots: The Department for Social Development (DSD) is the lead Department. However, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety did participate in a fuel poverty event organised by the Committee for Social Development on 16 November to identify the work being undertaken by the relevant Northern Ireland Departments with the aim of developing practical solutions to fuel poverty. The PHA invested £447,500 during 2010-11 to combat fuel poverty. Therefore, we do see it as a problem, and it is not something that is exclusive to the DSD.

Mr Dunne: What actions will the Minister take to improve survival rates from heart attacks in the Province?

Mr Poots: The best actions that we can take are as follows: first, we should encourage people to change their lifestyles so that they are less likely to have a heart attack in the first instance; secondly, if someone does have a heart attack, we should get them to the nearest hospital that has percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) available, because when you do so, you ensure that people can have hugely better outcomes. If someone can get to a hospital that has a catheterisation laboratory, have stents installed and the clot removed from their artery, their chances of recovery will be greatly increased. In fact, if people can get to those hospitals quickly it makes a large difference, because every hour that a person has to wait to have the stent installed takes around a year off their life. That is why we need to focus on ensuring that we have the right services available in the right places.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. That concludes Question Time.

3.00 pm

Committee Business

Department of Justice: Review of Initial Ministerial Provision

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (NIA 18/11-15) on its review of the initial ministerial provision in relation to the Department of Justice and the arrangements from 1 May 2012. — [Mr Moutray (The Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee).]

Mrs Overend: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on the motion. As a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, I add my thanks to the Committee staff and research staff for their work on the report. This report contains a fair amount of research on the issue. Yet, as my colleague Roy Beggs said, it contains little in the way of recommendations. As someone who looked on from the outside when the talks dragged on at Hillsborough and the Executive did not meet for over 100 days — something that the DUP/Sinn Féin duopoly likes to skip over — and as a new Member of the Assembly, I hoped that such situations had been left in the past. One of the reasons that my party voted against policing and justice being devolved in March 2010 was the potential instability that it could bring in the future. My party was attacked for doing its democratic duty. Indeed, with the issue raising its head again, we are justified in the concerns that we raised. However, the matter has moved on since then, and my party has accepted that we must carry on the work started by the Department of Justice.

The legislation is complex, and a new arrangement, which should be agreed for May 2012, cannot be taken lightly. The process of decision-making must be transparent and open. If we create a them-and-us situation around the justice post, the real danger is that the issue could produce more political instability and more polarised politics. Agreement on the Minister of Justice must be concluded before Christmas to avert any crisis and drawn-out talks, such as those we saw before the Hillsborough agreement. We have a tight deadline, should new legislation be needed. There should be inter-party talks now, not only on the sunset clause but on all aspects of the Assembly.

As my party leader highlighted in his letter to the Committee in response to the consultation on the provisions of the justice ministry:

“this review now provides an opportunity to reduce the number of government departments in Northern Ireland. This will require more detailed all Party discussions to discuss the out-workings and practicalities of such a decision, which would of course include the Department of Justice”.

I reiterate that it is a sad fact that the issue of policing and justice will yet again be centre stage at a time when all our energies should be put into creating and maintaining jobs in Northern Ireland to help to redevelop our economy, reskill our workforce and support our home-grown industries.

People want an effective and mature Government who meet and take decisions on difficult issues, something that this Assembly and Executive are not yet delivering.

The report highlights the serious and complex nature of this issue, and I welcome its publication. Hopefully, it will produce an opportunity to clarify some of the issues, and we will grasp the opportunity to find a way forward in a timely manner.

Mr Allister: This debate, in a way, is a mirror image and the cause of government working or not working in this place. It is indicative of the lurching from one expediency to another, which of course brought the Department of Justice into being and its present Minister into office. At the time, it was patched together with total disregard for any aspect of a mandate or respect for mandates. We ended up in the preposterous situation of having a party with eight Members gifted two Executive seats, while parties with twice as many Members and almost four times the number of votes as the Alliance Party ended up with one seat in the Executive. That, of course, was done out of sheer expediency to get past a certain difficulty.

We are now at the point of needing another sticking plaster. So, what do we do? We refer it to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. What a farce. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee will not make this decision. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee will go through the motions and produce vacuous reports such as today's, which tells you of this, that or the other option. However, it will not make any decisions. It simply awaits its instructions, which will come from the next Sinn Féin/DUP deal. Then, with great gravity, it will consider it and find it a fine proposition. It will rubber-stamp it, and it will return to the House as if it were a creature of democratic process, when everyone knows that it will be a decision taken not on principle but solely for expediency, behind closed doors, by the DUP and Sinn Féin. The Committee, of course, will lend itself to that farce.

I ask the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists this: are they going to be walked over again on this matter? Will they allow themselves again to be treated like second-class parties in the House? If option A is the preferred course of action, will they again toady to a situation where they and their electorate are insulted by the fact that the Alliance Party is elevated to a post and they are excluded? Are they going to nod their way through another farcical process in that regard?

Of course, there may be other options. We know that Sinn Féin wants to run d'Hondt. That has sent the DUP scurrying with a concern, because it has always boasted to the community that it controls Finance, the most important Ministry that there is, and that Sinn Féin will never hold the Justice Ministry. Of course, if d'Hondt is run as things are, Sinn Féin will hold one or the other. That is why Mr Robinson has come up with the wheeze that we do not really need a Department of Finance. In fact, in a great revelation, he has discovered that government would be so much more functional and efficient if we put the Department of Finance into his spending Department, the office of the joint First Ministers. It might be there to oversee every other Department and make sure that they audit and spend money correctly, but, in that way, the joint First Ministers could administer finance and the DUP could take the Justice Ministry. Then it could say to the gullible electorate, “Didn't

we tell you that we would save you from a Sinn Féin Justice Minister?”, never mind, of course, that it had given half the control of finance to Martin McGuinness. That is the sort of expediency politics that we are headed into. It betokens the dysfunctionality of this House and the fact that we are nowhere near good, solid, reliable government and that on this issue, of all issues —

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

Mr Allister: — we lurch from one crisis to another.

Mr Agnew: It is, indeed, an irony that the Justice Ministry post is the most unjustly allocated. Other parties taking part in this debate could have been accused of representing their own interests, but I do not think that the Green Party can be accused of that. When we voted on who the Justice Minister should be, we backed the Ulster Unionist candidate simply because that is how we believed things should be done. We believe that the Justice Ministry should be treated like any other and allocated under d'Hondt.

Mr Campbell: The Member said that the Green Party believed that it should be treated in the same way as any other party. He also said that it should have been treated equally under d'Hondt, but does he not agree that, if it had been treated equally under d'Hondt, the SDLP would have got the Justice Ministry? Why, then, did he back the Ulster Unionists?

Mr Agnew: If our mathematics were wrong, I apologise for that, but it was a principled position. As things stand and in terms of our own interests, I could put myself forward as Justice Minister, and, if it were the will of this Assembly, I could be Justice Minister. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, so could my colleagues Mr Allister or David McClarty. Mr Allister might have a tough time. *[Laughter.]*

At the DUP conference at the weekend, we heard the First Minister say that, if we want a better society, it cannot be about “them and us”. I agree with that sentiment, and that is why we must end the system that was designed to ensure that it cannot be “them”. In other words, from the DUP point of view, it cannot be Sinn Féin and, from the Sinn Féin point of view, it cannot be the DUP. The system was designed to keep those parties out. The Green Party cannot support that type of governance. Indeed, I am surprised that my colleagues in the Alliance Party are willing to continue to support that system.

Although I appreciate that, at the time, as Mr Allister has pointed out, the mechanism was put in place to ensure that justice was devolved — my party supported the devolution of justice — now is the time to move on and, indeed, forward into a more normalised form of government. The First Minister called for that at his party conference. We must work towards that. To bring the Justice Ministry under d'Hondt would do just that and bring us one step closer to normalised government in Northern Ireland.

Another anomaly in the system that needs to be addressed is that parties in the Assembly do not have to publish their political donations. If we are truly committed to normalised governance, we should get rid of that anomaly and provide full transparency to the electorate on how political parties are funded.

The Green Party supports option B3. We want to see the rerunning of d'Hondt, with the Justice Ministry to be included in that. We also support proposals for a reduction in the number of Departments. However, my party does not believe that the rerunning of d'Hondt should be conditional on a reduction in the number of Departments. In our view, that could be a de facto way to support the status quo, which to us is unacceptable.

Ultimately, our key objective should be to normalise the political process in Northern Ireland. Bringing the Justice Ministry under d'Hondt and treating it in the same way as any other Ministry is the best way to do that.

Mr Givan: My colleagues have outlined our party's position on the issue and how we believe that it should be taken forward. As a party, we have been consistent about the devolution of policing and justice. That has been supported by our party throughout all its different levels and structures. Indeed, when Mr Allister was a member of our party, he, too, supported the devolution of policing and justice. He canvassed for it. He got people to support it.

I have listened with interest to some of the commentary during the debate. I listened to Mr Allister when he talked about the issues that he has raised in the Chamber. I thought that pantomime season had started early this year. I wonder whether this place is becoming a soap opera for Mr Allister to entertain people, because there is no substance to what he says.

Mr Poots: The pantomime that is most attributable to Mr Allister is ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarves’. He perceives himself as Snow White. The seven dwarves represent the number of votes that his colleagues got in the election. Unfortunately —

Mr Allister: What about the snowmen?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. The other Member will stop shouting across the Chamber. All of us will return to the motion.

Mr Poots: Unfortunately, Dopey appears to have been the one who advised Mr Allister that Sinn Féin would be in control of policing and justice. Clearly, that has not been the case.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for his intervention. During the debate, Members mentioned the anomaly by which the Alliance Party holds two Ministries, given the number of votes that it received compared with other parties. There is a valid point in that. I believe that everyone would agree. I listened to Mr Allister's contribution on that issue. I ask myself how he proposes to fix it. Is he saying that the only way to fix it under current rules is to run d'Hondt? Therefore, does he support d'Hondt?

Mr Allister: My position is clear: I would never have a Justice Ministry within the confines of a terrorist-inclusive Government — period.

Mr Givan: Of course, then —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry. The Member must resume his seat. I ask again for moderation and good language.

Mr Givan: That verifies the point that my party makes consistently, which is that the Member wants direct rule. What he wants is to hand power back to a Government who

have neglected the interests of the unionist community for decades. He wants to hand power back to them and leave unionism powerless and with its destiny out of its own hands. My party does not subscribe to that position.

3.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: Yes, I will give way.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree that the present position is grossly unfair to the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists and that the system was effectively gerrymandered in favour of the Alliance Party? Indeed, does he agree with the First Minister who said recently that the situation was fundamentally unfair?

Mr Givan: Yes. I agree that it is an unfair system. However, it was a democratic decision by the people who put us here, and the Assembly voted for the circumstances that we are now in. That is not gerrymandering; that is the democratic process. I appreciate that the Member opposite does not like to recognise that his party is no longer in control and that circumstances have changed, but that is the way it is. The Assembly is operating St Andrews Agreement-style, not Good Friday Agreement-style, and Members need to take cognisance of that when we look at these issues.

I am sure that the Member will have taken the free advice provided by Mr Allister about his party's position. However, it is interesting that the SDLP now wants fairness in the allocation of —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No, I will not give way any further.

It is interesting that the Member opposite now wants fairness in the allocation of positions. Maybe that will allow the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists the opportunity to say, "We will work the Executive and stay in the Executive", because they do not seem to know their position on that. So, there is irony in the comments that are being made today in the Chamber.

A comment was made that this will be worked out at a higher level than the AERC and that this report was a sham. Interestingly enough, Mr Allister never made a submission to the AERC. When the opportunity was available for political parties to give their opinion on how this should operate, Mr Allister did not make a single contribution. However, he will now sit and try to pick holes, but he never provides a solution. He talked about the gullible electorate, but it is he who feels that the electorate is gullible. However, the last election showed that it was not gullible when it voted for this party and rejected his party. At that point, enough has been said.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I preface my remarks by thanking the Chair, Stephen Moutray, for bringing the report in front of the Assembly on behalf of the Committee. As Pat Sheehan, the Deputy Chair, is absent, I am making a winding-up speech on behalf of the Committee.

The report represents the fulfilment of the matter referred to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee by the Assembly on 10 October 2011, which said:

"That, pursuant to Standing Order 59(4)(b), this Assembly refers to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee the matter of a review of the initial ministerial provision in relation to the Department of Justice; and agrees that the Committee should make recommendations relating to the provision that should exist from 1 May 2012."— [Official Report, Bound Volume 67, p149, col 1].

As the Chairperson said this morning, no broad consensus could be reached on recommendations relating to the ministerial provision that should exist from 1 May 2012. However, the correct process of consultation with key stakeholders was followed, and the preferences of the stakeholders on the various options have been clearly set out in the Committee's report on the review.

I thank Members for their contributions today. In total, 10 Members spoke, and I do not feel that I have to repeat their positions. Each party outlined its position, and those are in the report. Only one Member's party did not make a contribution to the Committee throughout its consideration, but he certainly gave his views on what he felt was the best way forward or, indeed, the no way forward. We have to allow for some indulgence, and political rivalry maybe came to the fore at the latter stages of the debate, but, in the main, the party representatives and spokespersons outlined their respective positions, which are clearly reflected in the report.

On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Committee staff, who assisted the Committee in the review and in the production of the report. Their patience and diligence is to be commended. As the Chairperson of the Committee said, the issue is now for the Assembly's political parties, through the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I ask that the Assembly notes the Committee's report.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (NIA 18/11-15) on its review of the initial ministerial provision in relation to the Department of Justice and the arrangements from 1 May 2012.

Private Member's Business

Crimes Against Older and Vulnerable People

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

Mr Givan: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises that older and vulnerable people are deserving of respect and safety in their homes; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce legislation to impose mandatory minimum prison sentences for people who are found guilty of violent crimes against older or vulnerable people.

Many Members will have to deal with this issue at constituency level. In the various forms of media, the attacks on the elderly that take place are highlighted regularly. Clearly, it is a concern that is raised. The Executive have reflected on that concern in the draft Programme for Government, which makes it clear that the matter will be taken forward during the lifetime of this Assembly mandate. Therefore, there is a need to consider these issues, but we need to do it in a non-emotive fashion. Obviously, emotions can run high when we discuss this type of issue, but I want to go through the issues in a non-emotive fashion and try to make the points clearly on why we have tabled the motion.

There are a number of reasons. First, as everyone will agree, public confidence in the sentencing that is administered is low, and there is a greater need for deterrence. Public confidence may be low for a number of reasons. I accept that there is a lack of understanding among the public about how the court system operates. In my role as Chair of the Committee for Justice, I am learning every day how that system operates, and the more I see how it works, the better my understanding. Clearly, there is a job of work to be done to get that understanding of the systems that are in place and the sentences that are administered to the wider community. That is why we said that the introduction of some form of televising of court proceedings — perhaps of the sentence being given out — could be provided for so that the public can get a real feeling of what goes on in the courtroom and how decisions have been reached. That could go some way to helping the community to gain a better understanding.

Work has been taken forward on getting consistency in sentencing. The Minister put out for consultation proposals on sentencing guidance. I welcomed that as a positive step. Likewise, the Lord Chief Justice has considered the issue and has taken forward work on it. Now, the two have been able to dovetail together, and that is the right approach. I put on record my appreciation of how the Lord Chief Justice is handling the issue. I have met Sir Declan Morgan, and we have talked about the issue. He is opening up the office and engaging with the community in a way that has not happened before. That is to be welcomed, and efforts are being made in recognition of the fact that the judiciary is very much part of our society and that engagement with society is vital. That in no way diminishes judicial independence, which is critical and which our party

and, I think, everyone in the Chamber will always defend. Ultimately, it is for the judiciary to take a decision, but it must be within the framework that we, the politicians, decide. That is where the issue of mandatory sentencing comes in.

The Lord Chief Justice is reviewing a number of issues, and I share the frustration that, I believe, is implied with issues such as fuel laundering, which is being brought into the review. We heard evidence in the Justice Committee that, in the past decade, there were 40 prosecutions of individuals engaged in that activity but only four led to a custodial sentence. Those four were in 2001-02. Yet, whenever we compare that to similar incidents in England, we see that the majority of such cases there led to a custodial sentence. The Lord Chief Justice has agreed that that issue, for example, will be brought into the review, as the specialist unit that he established to review sentencing will consider it. I think that the reason for that is that guidance can usually be provided through the Court of Appeal whenever cases that are deemed unduly lenient are referred to it. That did not happen in those types of cases. Therefore, the Lord Chief Justice has brought that issue into the unit that he established to consider the matter. That is welcome and to be commended. Good work is taking place, and I support that.

On this issue, however, we need to send a clear message about attacks on older people — or senior citizens, as the Ulster Unionist Member for Upper Bann would clearly prefer older people to be called. On 'Stormont Today' last night, he seemed to make a particular issue of that. We need to send a clear message that attacks on the elderly will not be tolerated and that, if you attack an elderly person, you will go to jail. Therefore, we believe that a mandatory minimum sentence would be an approach that could be used to convey that message.

We are raising the issue and putting it out there. Members may agree with that approach or they may not. However, it is a real issue that is recognised in the Programme for Government, and I think that it is welcome that it is being debated. We should work together to find a mechanism that would be the best approach to dealing with this. In my constituency last week, an elderly couple — one who is 71 years of age and one who is 67 — had their house broken into. Five masked individuals physically pushed them through the door to get access, and that elderly couple was left traumatised. An attack on an elderly person is not the same as an attack on somebody of my age. It leaves them mentally traumatised and living in fear of crime in a way that does not affect other sections of the community. That is a category in our society that merits additional support and recognition in the judicial system. Therefore, we are putting this motion before the House today.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate our colleagues on the opposite Benches for bringing this motion and for putting the spotlight on the vicious and pernicious litany of attacks on senior citizens, especially bearing in mind the occasions when we have seen them on television and can actually see the physical damage. However, we have some difficulties with the motion. I want to take a bit of time to explain that, although I very much welcome the proposer's reference to the need for us to work together to come up with an appropriate response. I have two main reasons for being

concerned about the wording of the motion, but I wish to be very clear about the absolute requirement for the Assembly to agree an urgent and absolute response to these cowardly attacks and to do so appropriately and effectively.

The first concern relates to mandatory sentences. In our research, we found no example where that type of prescriptive approach was found to be either appropriate or effective.

There are many examples of this absolutely cowardly and vicious — as I described it earlier — phenomenon that has emerged in our society. However, there are no examples of the mandatory sentence approach having the desired deterrent effect. Given that we are working on this together, we have to consider —

3.30 pm

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate that there probably are not examples of mandatory sentences for this type of crime, but there are other examples in society whereby we effectively use mandatory sentences. For example, somebody who is guilty of a drink-driving offence will pretty much automatically receive a one-year licence suspension, which is effectively a mandatory sentence. From that perspective, it is not completely outside the sphere of the judicial system.

Mr McLaughlin: I take the Member's point, but the statistics argue that that approach has not had a deterrent effect. In many instances, legislators are scratching their heads to come up with a more effective and comprehensive response to drink-driving, because people are either not hearing the message or ignoring it, and our Health Minister was discussing that in a slightly different context today.

In this circumstance, we are dealing with a very vulnerable section of our community, and our response has to be seen to be effective. That is what I would argue, and I hope that colleagues accept that.

My second issue relates directly to the motion and the use of the word "violent". I ask colleagues to reflect on what lawyers, the judiciary and the courts would make of the use of that word. We are talking about not only violence but harm. We have seen terrible examples of people who have been viciously beaten, but we have also seen people who have been traumatised and terrorised in their old age and in their own homes by attacks in which physical violence was not used but victims were put in terror of their lives, and there was a consequent psychological impact.

Violence and harm are the types of concepts that I would like to be discussed and responded to. I ask colleagues to consider whether the use of the word "violent" might be counterproductive, especially if clever defence lawyers get to work on circumstances in which there was a robbery and an older victim or victims but no physical damage to be seen. In those circumstances, is it possible that a mandatory and prescriptive sentencing policy would not deal with the crime?

I am pleased to see the Justice Minister here. I ask that he takes forward the work with the Lord Chief Justice. I very much welcome the fact that there is a unit in the offices of the Lord Chief Justice and the Attorney General that is looking at the issues, because we have to look at sentencing policy urgently.

We also need to look at the police response and tactics. I am quite certain that they are as anxious to come up with effective responses as anyone else. We should also consider consulting the recently appointed Commissioner for Older People, Claire Keatinge, in drawing up protocols and guidance.

I ask the Minister to move the matter forward. We thought about tabling an amendment but decided against it, because we would prefer to have a discussion with colleagues opposite, consider this in the round and, if the Minister indicated in his response that he is prepared to bring forward a review and come back with a report and recommendations, perhaps revisit the issue rather than going to a Division.

I thank colleagues for tabling the motion, but, as it is worded and presented, it may not have the desired effect. We are all agreed that an effective response is needed.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Members who tabled the motion because it raises some serious issues that the House needs to debate. I cannot disagree with the rationale of the motion, which is to ensure proper sentences for those who attack older, vulnerable people. However, I have some reservations about the method that the DUP is using to go about it, and I will come back to that point later.

First, I want to deal with the matter at hand, which is the appalling attacks on older and vulnerable people in our society. Those attacks are often brutal and violent, and they are made worse by the fact that the perpetrators know full well the vulnerable circumstances of their victims. I fully believe that we as an Assembly need to work to curb that type of crime. It is one of the lowest forms of crime, and, for that reason, I do not think that anyone in the House would not agree with the first part of the motion, which states:

"that older and vulnerable people are deserving of respect and safety in their homes".

We must also be mature about this and realise that the fear of crime among older people is often the real problem. I call on the Minister to outline how he intends to address this important issue and tackle the fear of crime among our older people. My mother is 83 years old, and I want to ensure that older people like her do not spend their evenings living in fear of victimisation.

There are a few issues with the part of the motion that calls on the Justice Minister to introduce mandatory minimum sentences. Let me be clear that I support tougher sentences for criminals who attack older and vulnerable people, but I am sceptical of the idea that mandatory minimum sentences are the way forward. I believe that the independence of the judiciary needs to be respected, and judges should be capable of making decisions that take into account issues such as the seriousness of the crime, the circumstances of the offender and the impact on the victim, as well as any mitigating and aggravating factors.

I refer to a letter received by my colleague Basil McCrea in response to a query to the Lord Chief Justice about sentencing for attacks against the elderly. The letter stated that in order to reflect public revulsion of such attacks, the courts indicated that condign punishment should be imposed on the offender. In one such case — *R v Ferguson* in 1989 — the Court of Appeal upheld a sentence of eight

years that was imposed after three offenders entered the home of an elderly couple, swearing at and threatening them. The house was ransacked, and the homeowner, who suffered from emphysema, was beaten with a crowbar and garden hoe, and had his nebuliser mask kicked away.

I am also concerned about the great number of offences that are covered by the term “violent crimes”, as the term covers offences against the person, sexual offences and robbery. Offences against the person could refer to a threatening phone call to an elder person. Is the DUP saying that that should be subject to the same mandatory minimum sentence as a brutal physical assault on an older person? Other Members have highlighted examples where that approach would not be just. It seems to me that the DUP has not thought through the wording of the motion sufficiently, and I ask for clarification.

I received an e-mail last night from one of my constituents, in which she stated:

“I’m afraid to say the situation at my house has not improved any. Since last speaking to you there have been 3 other incidents — totally fed up and scared living in my own home at the moment.”

That lady suffered from air being let out of her tyre and the valve stolen, damage to the top of the car and her fence being vandalised again. She is not elderly and could not be classed as vulnerable in the legal context of the word, as she is in her 20s. Therefore, I disagree with Mr Givan. Her next door neighbour is in her 70s and will not go out at night. Will the proposed law deal with incidents involving one person differently from those involving another? If so, it will not be a fair and equitable law.

I also ask the Minister to progress the work that is being done on sentencing guidelines in Northern Ireland. I understand that he is working with the Lord Chief Justice on that, and I urge him to continue that work. I believe that this is where the real debate is, as clear sentencing guidelines — for all types of crime — will undoubtedly improve public confidence and consistency in sentencing decisions, resulting in a reduction in the fear of crime. Perhaps we can look to England and Wales as an example, as they have the Sentencing Council, and Scotland has legislated for a similar approach.

I support the motion because of its rationale and because I want tougher sentences for those who are most deserving of them, although I have raised some issues that I would like the DUP to take on board.

Mr A Maginness: I thank Mr Givan and his colleagues for tabling the motion. It is important and timely.

I agree with his comments about the Lord Chief Justice, in that I think that he has done admirable work in trying to reach out to the community and in trying to take into account the views of the community and of politicians. He has done so in a fearless fashion and without any interference with his personal integrity as a judge, or, indeed, the independence of the judiciary. That is a very important step. The creation of the unit in relation to sentencing is a very positive step and will be of great benefit to the development of sentencing policy by the judges. Of course, civil society, including ourselves, will have some input into that. That is very important. Of course, there are boundaries

between us and the judiciary that should not be interfered with in any way, and I think that is recognised by all in the House.

Any crimes against older people or the vulnerable are so shameful that they must be marked out and characterised by severe sentences to deter those who carry them out. That is a clear message that should come from the House. However, it should also be pointed out that crimes against older people are relatively rare — I emphasise the term “relatively”. Indeed, violent crimes in particular are more likely to be suffered by those between the ages of 16 and 24. Indeed, Northern Ireland is one of the safest places to live if compared with other jurisdictions.

It is important to try to reassure older people that they do, in general terms, live in a safe community and in a society that is cognisant of their issues and fears. There is a tremendous fear of crime among older people. That is borne out by successive surveys of older people. We have to try to address that issue of fear of crime itself. Indeed, Age Concern, as a result of a survey, indicated that older people felt that that could be addressed by more police on the beat; better street lighting; more effective policies against antisocial behaviour, and I know that the Department of Justice has embarked on that; less media sensationalisation of crime, which tends to build up fear; and more work to help young people understand the needs of older people. If those things were put into effect, I think that we could reassure older people. Clearly a message has to go out that tougher sentences are important in relation to that type of violent crime.

I cannot agree with mandatory sentencing in that context. I do not believe that you can simply have a mandatory minimum sentence and believe that that inflexible instrument will cure all. I do not believe that that is a good way of approaching sentencing.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. How does he square what he has just said with his earlier remarks, when he said that attacks on the elderly:

“must be ... characterised by severe sentences”?

If there must be a severe sentence, does that not mean that there must be a minimum tariff?

Mr A Maginness: I do not accept that. Do I get another 60 seconds? It is very important to get my 60 seconds.

Sentencing is the province of the judiciary. I do not believe that the judiciary should be fettered in relation to sentencing. Sentencing is very complex indeed. Sentencing is governed by guidelines laid down by the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland; it is very important that we recognise that. We should also recognise its complexity and that it is based on the facts of each individual case. If we recognise that it is heavily fact-dependent, it is important that we give judges as much flexibility as possible. That does not rule out tough sentences for this type of crime.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr A Maginness: Mandatory sentencing is not the best way to achieve the laudable aim that you wish to achieve.

Mr Dickson: We are all appalled at the disgraceful and cowardly attacks against older and vulnerable people that have taken place in the past few weeks. The sickening attack on two pensioners in Newtownabbey at the weekend is just one example. Those offences are particularly repugnant and detestable. We, as a society, have a responsibility to protect older and vulnerable people.

We must remember that those who feel vulnerable are not just the elderly but people who may be of another skin colour or sexual orientation. We must also do all in our power to ensure that all those who feel vulnerable are safe. For the most part, they are, thanks to reduced crime rates. PSNI statistics show that people over the age of 65 are least likely to be the victims of violent crime and account for less than 2% of violent crime that occurred in the past year. That is certainly not in any way to excuse those who carry out some of the most horrific attacks on the elderly and the vulnerable in their homes.

I want to quote very briefly from correspondence, which was quoted from earlier by our Ulster Unionist colleagues, to Mr McCrea from Laurene McAlpine, who is the principal private secretary to the Lord Chief Justice in Northern Ireland. In the letter she states:

“Earlier this year following public consultation, the judicial sentencing group established by the Lord Chief Justice published its first programme of action, which identified areas where new sentencing guidelines would be useful. One of those areas is attacks on vulnerable people, including the elderly.”

For my life, I cannot understand why, therefore, the Chair of the Justice Committee has brought this motion. He has been through this debate already and should know that this very serious issue has been taken to heart and is being dealt with very seriously as we speak. As others have done, I encourage him to withdraw the motion and allow further discussion.

I will continue to quote from the correspondence from the Lord Chief Justice's office:

“Such offences are, therefore, regarded very seriously by the judiciary. As you can appreciate, however, the court considers each case individually. It is therefore impossible to say that a non-custodial sentence would never be imposed. If, however, that is the result of a particular case, it would have been the decision reached by a professional experienced judge after very serious consideration of all the relevant facts.”

I prefer to trust the judiciary rather than the proposers of the motion when it comes to dealing with sentencing in Northern Ireland.

As far back as 1988, in dismissing an appeal for sentencing in Northern Ireland of 12 years' imprisonment for robbery when a couple were robbed at gunpoint in their own home, the Lord Chief Justice said:

“It is the duty of the courts to seek to protect people who live in isolated places, and I make it clear to those who commit such offences that, if they are caught and convicted, they will receive heavy punishment.”

I have no doubt that, as late as 29 November 2011, the judiciary in Northern Ireland fully understands its responsibility when it comes to sentencing in these circumstances.

We need to ensure that these people are caught. That comes about through community co-operation, good policing and good intelligence. When an attack occurs on a vulnerable individual, whether it is a couple in their home, someone in the street or whomever, it is important that this society and community provides the appropriate evidence to the police, who in turn can provide for a prosecution in the courts.

I have every confidence that the courts in Northern Ireland are fully aware of their responsibilities to society. They have been listening. The Justice Committee knows full well that the Lord Chief Justice takes very seriously the whole issue of sentencing guidelines, and I am content that he is dealing with those matters in an appropriate way.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: I have finished.

Mr Weir: There are a number of points that need to be made. First, we should remind ourselves that we are dealing with a private Members' motion. This is about pointing the direction in which we want to go. Some Members have raised concerns about the exact wording of the motion, and I take on board what Mitchel McLaughlin said about framing the legislation and the need to look at the wording and to consider the words “violence” and “harm”. I believe that those words could be incorporated in the legislation. This is about pointing the direction of travel. Therefore, if there are reservations over the exact wording, those can be taken on board.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will be happy to give way.

Mr Dickson: The Member says that we need guidelines for pointing the direction of travel. I feel that the Member has not listened to what I was saying. The Lord Chief Justice is pointing the direction in which we need to travel.

Mr Weir: The Member clearly did not listen to me, because I did not say that we needed guidelines. He must have misheard me. This is about pointing the direction of travel in terms of the legislation. As the Programme for Government is committed to tougher sentences, which his party signed up to, perhaps the Member has not only not heard but not read.

The House is united in wanting to see tougher sentences, but, with the best will in the world, there were two isolated examples of tougher sentences in 1988 and 1989. I have no doubt that, on many occasions, the courts will give tough sentences. Do I have confidence that guidelines will go far enough? Even in the words that were quoted to us, there may be circumstances in which a non-custodial sentence, even for an attack on the elderly, will be the appropriate manner. How does that give a watertight assurance on the issue?

It has been pointed out, and I acknowledge that, generally speaking, the vast majority of assaults are committed by young males on young males. That is true. However,

as regards the motion, so what? There may be a limited number of attacks on the elderly, but one attack is one too many. It is time that we took action on this issue.

While the numbers may be limited, the impact of an attack — this is where there is a differentiation — on a member of the elderly community, in terms of the public view of crime and in terms of the impact on that person — whether you call them elderly or a senior citizen — can be much more devastating than it is on any other member of the public. Sometimes, elderly people never properly recover after such attacks. They may be left feeling fearful for the rest of their life. Therefore, there is a high level of impact.

A number of Members raised the issue of inflexibility. This is about ensuring that an attack on the elderly actually carries a custodial sentence. We can debate the exact level of that sentence, but it allows a level of flexibility. Presumably, if you have a minimum and a maximum sentence, there will be a range for the judge to decide within when taking into account the circumstances.

As indicated, we already use minimum mandatory sentences for issues such as drink-driving. There is a mandatory life sentence for anyone who commits murder. Therefore, the principle has been established. Mr Maginness said that he does not want to fetter the judiciary, but I do not believe that that is the case. He said that sentencing should not be fettered. On that basis, is he going to support legislation to remove all maximum sentences for any offence? If sentencing cannot be fettered, why not simply give a free hand to the judiciary to put forward any sentence for any crime? It seems to me that maximum sentences can be accepted but not minimum sentences.

We need to send out a clear signal that considerable harm is being done out there and that we are not just going to talk about guidelines, but, in all cases, that those are actually going to be followed through. I am not confident that the courts will give a tough sentence in that circumstance on all occasions.

In the past, we have, unfortunately, seen a number of occasions when crimes that should have received a much tougher sentence were given what many of us would see as a slap on the wrist by the courts. That has happened, and I believe that we need to take action against that.

We need to stamp out attacks on older and vulnerable people. I believe that a very strong guaranteed deterrent of a minimum sentence would send out that clear signal. I urge Members to support the motion. Let us work on some of the details, but we should support the motion so that we can then have a direction of travel that puts into action all our words of condemnation of those attacks.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest in the subject, as I have a very elderly parent living at home. I agree with my colleague Mr McLaughlin's comments about the Minister's being here to take on board all the issues and arguments. It would be sad if the House were to divide on such an important and sensitive issue concerning older people.

However, I do not think that mandatory sentences are the answer. Crimes against older people are appalling and are to be condemned in all instances, but I think that better community infrastructure is required to give old and

vulnerable people, who often feel isolated, a feeling of inclusion and security.

Approximately three years ago, Help the Aged surveyed older people, and 73% of those surveyed stated that they felt marginalised in the areas in which they lived. Whenever I attend district policing partnership (DPP) meetings, the PSNI tell us constantly that the incidence of crimes against older people is low. However, that is absolutely no consolation to the person who is robbed or attacked. I think that another Member made the point that one crime against the elderly is one crime too many. I endorse that absolutely.

We can list a number of incidents in our constituencies when older people have been attacked. In my constituency recently, a 90-year-old woman was viciously attacked and traumatised. She was held down by an attacker while another ransacked her house. To date, no one has been apprehended. If the incidence of those crimes is so low, by definition, there should be a higher detection rate.

The courts should be in a position to apply appropriate levels of punishment and sentencing, taking into account all the circumstances, including the degree of violence and intimidation used by the perpetrators. If mandatory sentences were introduced, it is possible that the Public Prosecution Service would opt for the lesser charges, so the purpose of minimum mandatory sentences would be undermined.

The issues of the vulnerability of older people and of how they are considered and treated need to be addressed in a wider sense. Attacks against older people need to be tackled, but I do not think that mandatory sentences are the answer.

As one of my colleagues mentioned, there is a very important role for the Commissioner for Older People, Claire Keatinge. She should have an input. I ask the Members opposite to consider what has been said.

Mr S Anderson: I support the motion. On Saturday, at our party conference, my party leader sounded out a very clear warning of our intention to introduce tougher sentences for those who are charged and found guilty of attacks on older people. He said:

"As far as we are concerned, if you attack a pensioner, pack your bags, you're going to jail."

If anyone questions the timing, relevance or importance of those remarks or of the motion, they need look no further than the front page of yesterday's 'News Letter'. There they will read the harrowing and very moving account of the latest in what is a long line of attacks on elderly people in their homes. It happened on Saturday evening, just hours after Peter Robinson's speech. Mr Colin Bell, aged 71, lives with his sister Eileen, who is 72. At teatime on Saturday evening, a gang of four men broke down the door of their Newtownabbey home, where they have lived for the past 45 years. They stole all their savings and their winter fuel allowance. If that was not bad enough, those cowardly thugs struck Mr Bell on the head.

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

In another incident on Saturday evening, this time in Ballycastle, the home of two elderly sisters was robbed

when they were out. Thankfully, they were out and were probably spared an assault and injury. Imagine how they felt when they arrived home.

A recent BBC 'Panorama' programme looked at the impact of a robbery on victims' lives. It is clear that, regardless of whether you are young or old, an invasion of your home causes trauma and shock, which can leave a permanent mark.

If it is bad when you are a young victim, just think for a moment how much worse it is when you are a senior citizen. The attack on Mr Bell and his sister and the incident in Ballycastle are just the latest in a series of similar attacks. In most cases, defenceless and vulnerable senior citizens are not only robbed but physically injured. The physical injuries might heal but, sadly, they might never get over the psychological trauma.

4.00 pm

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Anderson: Do I get an extra minute? Yes.

Mr Bell: There are two things, Deputy Speaker, that we need to say. First, we need to reassure most of the elderly people out there that they will never be the victim of an attack. Secondly, the attacks that are occurring are occurring on a minority of people. However, there is a time to speak and a time for the House to stay silent. I put it to the House that now is the time to speak and give a clear message that we believe that there are no circumstances where someone who has carried out a violent assault on an elderly person should not go to jail. Given that there are no circumstances, there should be no ifs and no buts: you attack an elderly person, this House is behind you, and we will send you by due process of the law straight to jail.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr S Anderson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I agree with everything that junior Minister Bell said. We need to speak up for our elderly citizens. We need to do more, and we need to act on their behalf. That is the purpose of the motion. We are calling for a robust change in the legislation so that courts will be required to impose a custodial sentence on those who carry out violent attacks on the elderly and the vulnerable. Junior Minister Bell said recently that for anyone who carries out violence against the elderly and the vulnerable it must be a case of do not pass go, do not collect £200, go straight to jail.

This is not a knee-jerk reaction to some new development in our society — far from it. Attacks on the elderly and the vulnerable have been a major problem for some time. We are entering the darkest time of the year as we approach Christmas. I feel that the spate of attacks on the elderly and vulnerable will increase. I represent a rural constituency. If these are worrying times for those living in towns and villages, just think how much worse it is for those living in isolated rural areas. They lock their doors as darkness falls and live in fear until the next morning. Every sound — even if it is only the wind, a cat, a dog or whatever — causes alarm and stress. We need to do what we can to offer those people hope.

I agreed fully with the views expressed by Minister Danny Kennedy after an attack on an 85-year-old man in his home in the Mountnorris area of County Armagh in November 2009. He quite rightly described that attack and those responsible as vile and the lowest of the low. That, indeed, is precisely what they are. Therefore, I am concerned that Mr Kennedy's party colleague Basil McCrea, in his recent comments, seemed reluctant to support the measures proposed in the motion. Mr McCrea's argument was that because the trend of attacks is downward, we must be careful not to cause panic among the elderly. He argued that we need to reassure them. That is all well and good, but as I said, those who have been attacked and those who live in fear of being attacked do not want to hear fine words about statistics and downward trends. They want to be reassured that someone cares and that action is being taken to protect them. Surely a mandatory minimum prison sentence will help to offer that assurance.

Even if the trend is downwards, let us build on that and speed it up by making it clear that the gutless thugs who attack and target elderly people in their homes will pay a high price for their crime. I am greatly disappointed by Mr McCrea's attitude. Given the choice between criminal thugs and vulnerable elderly people, how can there be any justification for treading softly on the thugs and thus letting down the vulnerable and the elderly?

I am also interested to know where Mr McCrea's Upper Bann colleagues Sam Gardiner and Jo-Anne Dobson stand on this. They have already been challenged on this in the local press and have chosen to remain silent. Surely the people of Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown deserve to know. It is worth noting that there were 12 robberies in a few hours in Portadown recently —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is coming to the end of his time.

Mr S Anderson: — in one evening. I am convinced that the threat of a prison sentence would be a considerable deterrent, and that is why we tabled today's motion. I commend it to the House.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt in éadan an mholta seo. Thank you very much. Paul Givan and his colleagues are to be congratulated for bringing this important issue to the Assembly. Indeed, in his opening remarks, Mr Givan said that he wanted to debate the issue in a constructive, non-emotive way, and that is the way in which the debate should take place. Unfortunately, there has been some indulgence in seeing who can come out with the best adjective to describe some attacks and then use it to attack the positions of other political parties. I do not think that that is the way the debate should progress.

In his contribution, Mitchel McLaughlin made the point that we want to be constructive and debate this in a very calm way. We do not want the House to divide on the motion. He made the offer, and we await the words of the Minister to see what measures he can put in place to ensure that, whatever concerns or issues are raised around attacks on the elderly, they will be presented in a dignified and constructive manner. That is what we should do, rather than seek confrontation or raise emotion.

I do not say this in a judgemental or pejorative way, but something has been absent so far from the contributions of the proposers of the motion; they have not told us whether there has been an increase in the number of attacks. A number of incidents have been highlighted, but we have not been told whether there has been an increase. If there has been an increase, we have something to be concerned about. Nor did the proposers tell us what the detection rate is for these particular crimes. Is the detection rate low? Has it decreased over the last number of years? That is something that we would all be concerned about. They did not tell us what the conviction rate is for these crimes when people are brought before the courts. Is there a suggestion that convictions are not happening? Is that down to bad collection of evidence, bad decisions made by the Public Prosecution Service or bad prosecutions on the day?

Mr Wells: Quite frankly, many Members on this side are not worried about detection or conviction rates; it is a matter of whether it is right or wrong. If two young thugs break into a pensioner's house and terrorise him, I do not care if that is the only incident in south Down in that year, those people should go to jail for a very long time. This is all somewhat irrelevant. People are demanding that the firmest possible action be taken against such thugs. They are not interested in the statistics that surround those crimes; they want them behind bars.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCartney: Before I comment on that remark, I want, like Michael Brady, to declare an interest. My parents, Liam and Bessie, are 86 and 85 respectively, so I have an understanding of how old people relate to this issue. You make the assumption that, when two people are arrested for committing an offence against elderly people, they do not get the appropriate sentence. That is the problem; there is an idea that calling for a mandatory sentence will mean that all will be harm-free and everything will be rosy in the garden. That is why I ask the question.

People want to know and be reassured that, if they are attacked, those responsible will be detected. They may then have an interest, as we all would, in how the courts deal with them, but, if they are not put in front of the courts, it does not matter what the sentence is. The point we are trying to make is that the idea that a mandatory sentence will, in some way, reduce the number of attacks has not been sustained by any of the proposers of the motion nor, as Mitchel McLaughlin pointed out, is it sustained by evidence. Indeed, the evidence in our jurisdictions is the opposite: it is that mandatory sentences do not lead to a lower level or rate of crime. That is important.

There is another aspect to this issue. Alban Maginness touched on the fear of such attacks. I hope that the Minister will address this. The Department, which has been in front of the Committee, told us of the measures it is taking. From my parents, I know that the housing development in which they live was designed in a particular way that assists safety in the environment. Antisocial behaviour is practically non-existent, thanks to good design and community infrastructure. For places like Dove Gardens, a new housing development in Derry, time was taken to allow residents, the Housing Executive, the police and all the agencies to come together and try to design out antisocial behaviour. Bungalows are placed in a particular part of the housing

development so that older people are in dwellings that are well-placed and well-designed. They have good community infrastructure, which makes attacks on them even more difficult.

That is the type of thing that we should be doing, not running in front of microphones, calling for seven-year mandatory sentences and then challenging political opponents as if they are somehow weak because they have a different point of view. Elderly people are not reassured by people shouting down microphones on 'The Stephen Nolan Show' to see who can beat their chest the hardest. We have to ensure that, when someone breaks into an old person's home, they will be detected and brought in front of the courts and that proper sentences will then come about.

A number of Members said that the Lord Chief Justice —

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

Mr McCartney: — has put in place sentencing guidelines. That is where our focus and attention should be, not on seeking headlines.

Mr Eastwood: I begin by agreeing with Members who said that anyone who violently attacks older people or anyone in our society should be dealt with decisively by the judiciary. However, the Assembly should be about trying to find real solutions to problems. Mandatory minimum sentences are not the way to do that. The debate raises important issues that pertain to every community in the North. There is a real need for more effective community policing, and more needs to be done to tackle the fear of crime, which many in our community undoubtedly have.

The issue is much more complex than the simplicity afforded to it in the motion. If our older population is exposed to less crime than any other age demographic yet fears it more than any other demographic, the question that naturally arises is whether the motion is the most appropriate response. The blunt instrument of mandatory minimums will serve as bad legislative practice and an empty gesture to our older population.

Age Concern has emphasised that there is a broader context to the cause of older people's fear of crime. Sensationalist headlines or simplistic legislation will not protect older people. Age Concern states that fear:

"causes a destructive 'locked in, locked out' cycle for older people — they lock themselves into their homes to protect their safety and security and as a result lock themselves out of their communities. This causes more isolation, loneliness and fear."

The solutions, therefore, are rooted in the compassion of our communities towards older people, in well-resourced community policing and in ensuring that our older population is imbued with a sense of belonging and self-confidence.

We must allow the Lord Chief Justice to continue his work on reviewing sentences. The Assembly should not stand in the way of well-researched and expert approaches to sentencing by imposing ill-thought-out reactionary legislation. It is clear that those who carry out attacks on vulnerable members of our community need to be dealt with decisively, but this is not the way to do it.

Mr D McIlveen: I support the motion, and I congratulate my colleagues for bringing it forward. I cannot disagree with a number of the comments that have been made by some Members today. I know that crime levels against older people are relatively low, and I know that older people are the least likely age group to be a victim of crime. However, I also know that 502 violent crimes and 1,081 domestic burglaries were recorded against older people from April 2008 to March 2009. That is around 1,500 people aged 65 and over who have been violently attacked or burgled in a single year. Although we are told time and again that, in reality, pensioners do not need to fear crime, those 1,500 people represent 1,500 individual cases in which our older generation, the people who built this country, were attacked or burgled.

Those 1,500 people are only the starting point. In addition to the people who are victims of crime, every single incident sends a ripple effect of fear around the community. Older people are much more likely to live in fear of crime, and they are much more likely to allow that fear to have a significant impact on their day-to-day lives. There are some frightening statistics. According to the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament, 64% of older people who were surveyed cited fear of crime as one of their top priorities. In 2004, an Age Concern survey found that around half of the respondents over 75 were afraid to leave their homes after dark.

4.15 pm

The Older People's Advocate reported that older people need constant reassurance that their interests are being protected. I must, then, ask this: would it not be better if we showed older people that there are no excuses for attacking them? We should let them know that they are valued, that we are looking after them and that we will not accept lenient sentences for those who attack them. Let us not forget that this is all in the context of an ageing population. One statistic estimates that older people could make up 25% of the population by 2041. It is simply not acceptable, therefore, that we ignore the needs and fears of that section of our society.

We have to pause and make some mention of the media and the reporting of such incidents. I am a strong advocate of a free media. When democracy is under threat, a free media is the first thing to be attacked, so I will always be an advocate of it. However, the media have to be responsible in their reporting of these events. I send out that message loud and clear today. They have to think very carefully about the effect of their reporting on wider society. I would hate it to get to the stage where media outlets use older, vulnerable people as a means of boosting ratings. That cannot be allowed to happen. The Assembly must send out a message loud and clear to the media that they must be responsible for the way in which they report those issues.

We have to acknowledge — coming back to the main point — that there are failures in our judicial system at present. The prosecution can appeal sentences only in exceptionally limited circumstances. Therefore, when the public perceive sentences to be too lenient, there is very little that the Public Prosecution Service can do about that. That limited appeal right is compounded by the fact that aggravated assault, for example, has a maximum sentence of seven years and a minimum penalty of a fine. As a result, there

is a perceived inconsistency in sentencing for that type of offence.

The independence of the judiciary is vital. However, equally important is consistency in sentencing and public confidence in that sentencing. Despite the fact that crime has fallen in Northern Ireland in recent years, almost two in three respondents to the Northern Ireland crime survey believe that crime is worse than it was two years ago. There is obviously a lot of work to do in order to improve confidence in the criminal justice system.

I find it extremely difficult to argue with sending out a clear message that if you attack an older or vulnerable person, you will go to jail. I do not see how anybody in the House can stand against that. The people of North Antrim whom I represent will certainly not be soft on crime, and I am interested to hear what the other Members for North Antrim will say in this debate. Again, I support the motion and commend it to the House.

Mr Allister: Emotionally, I can identify very readily with the motion. All of us, I think, recognise that attacks on the elderly have to be amongst the most repulsive of crimes that can be committed and that, therefore, there have to be severe deterrent sentences in place in order to deal with such wanton attacks. The question, though, is whether proper due process and proper deterrent sentences require mandatory sentences, which remove the discretion from the judge, whose purpose it is to sentence, and which hamstring him with the requirement that he must give a certain minimum sentence with no regard to the circumstances of a particular crime.

The vast majority of people who appear on serious assault charges in respect of elderly people deserve, and will get, serious sentences. However, let me give you a real-life example to evaluate whether there is logic, sense and workability in imposing mandatory sentences. A pensioner paedophile assaulted a young boy. The father of the young boy then took it upon himself to go round to that pensioner's house. One word borrowed another; he struck him and broke his jaw.

Should that father go to jail for seven years, or for any time, or should he be dealt with through, for example, a suspended sentence? Under what is proposed in the motion, that individual would start with the same minimum sentence as the ghoulish thug who, with violence on his mind, goes into a house and beats up a defenceless old couple. That is where the concept of mandatory sentences begins to fall apart. They are a bit like mandatory coalitions: they do not work in practice. We need to tread carefully.

Given that the motion has come before the House, I confess that I am surprised that no one was able to parade a single case of inadequate sentence. We have had many words, but no Members have stood up and read from a newspaper a description of a case in which someone got an inadequate sentence. Why is that? I am not saying that there have not been inadequate sentences. However, there is a mechanism whereby sentences that are deemed inadequate can be referred to the Court of Appeal, and that mechanism has been used properly many times.

Mr Wells: The learned Member has practised at the Bar for a quarter of a century, and he knows that sentences are not only punishments but deterrents. Does he not accept that, if

a thug knows that if he is caught after burgling the home of a little old lady and causing her injury he will go to prison for seven years, he will be less likely to set out on that crime in the first place?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allister: Of course he should go to prison and of course there should be a deterrent sentence, but is the Member saying that the man from the real-life example that I gave should go to prison for seven years? That is the outworking of what the honourable Member is urging on the House: that there should be no exceptions and that if you, in any circumstances in the eyes of the law, assault someone, you will go to prison, no questions asked.

I am pointing out that some cases are capable of having unique distinguishing factors, and that you cannot apply a one-size-fits-all approach to every case. Let us have severe and tough, deterrent sentences, but let us do it through the due process of the referral of deficient sentences and through the guidelines from the Court of Appeal. I can tell you, Court of Appeal guidelines work: you cannot weave your way around them.

Mr Storey: The Member does not agree that there should be a mandatory sentence. However, if someone were to be sentenced in the context of the attack that he outlined, would the use of the Court of Appeal not be applicable in those circumstances?

Mr Allister: Yes — if the Attorney General thought that it was a lenient sentence. However, I cannot dream of circumstances in which the Attorney General would think that it was a lenient sentence. That intervention demonstrates one of the problems of this debate: a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. One Member told the House that there are mandatory sentences for drink-driving offences. There is no mandatory sentence whereby you would go to jail for drink-driving. There is a mandatory disqualification —

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

Mr Allister: — which is utterly different from a mandatory incarceration. As I say, a little knowledge creates quite a dangerous situation.

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

Mr Allister: Let us be clear —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: Of course this must be dealt with, but we must have a system that can deal with everyone.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Thank you. I call Mr George Robinson, and because of the restrictions on the debate the Member will have four minutes.

Mr G Robinson: Follow that. It is a sad reflection on today's society that we must debate this motion, which I fully support. I was brought up to respect and honour my elders. I watched the recent news coverage of battered and bruised pensioners who were picked on by cowards. That is what they are, because the perpetrators of such attacks know that pensioners and the elderly are the most vulnerable

people in our society. I have sat beside terrified pensioners after they had sustained similar attacks to those that are outlined in the motion, and I appreciate the devastation and lifelong trauma that those incidents leave.

It must be emphasised that some older and vulnerable people who are the victims of such attacks never recover from the experience. Indeed, they receive a life sentence of fear. That is an absolute disgrace. Most of those people have contributed to our society by working hard and paying their way in life, unlike some of those morons who have committed such heinous crimes. That is why I believe that anyone convicted of such attacks must serve a fixed period in jail.

As a society, we cannot permit the current situation to continue. Such crime must be suitably punished, and the judiciary must ensure that our older and vulnerable people are properly protected, with maximum sentencing to fit the crime. The First Minister recently stated that, as far as the DUP is concerned:

"if you attack a pensioner, pack your bags, you're going to jail."

That is a statement with which I fully concur. I hope that every Member supports this very worthwhile motion from my colleagues, as our elderly deserve to live life free from fear and without being imprisoned in their own homes.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I welcome the Assembly's interest in this particular issue. Indeed, we are a little behind the times, because just last week the Pensioners Parliament, meeting in the Senate Chamber, debated a similar issue. It called for the fear of crime among older people to be a priority in the new community safety strategy. It also called for older people's concerns to be taken into account.

A number of people cited attacks that have taken place in recent weeks and that have, quite rightly, been subject to widespread condemnation externally and here this afternoon. All crime has to be condemned, but crimes against older and vulnerable people are particularly abhorrent. It would be a great pity if, as a result of this debate, older people became more fearful about their safety than is justified. We in this House have a responsibility to ensure that we do not add to people's fears in the same way as the media has done, as has been highlighted. I do not want, in any way, to lessen the dreadful impact that individual crimes have on victims and their immediate families, but we should also be clear, as has been said, that attacks against older people in Northern Ireland, especially violent crimes, are relatively rare. Statistics show that people aged 65 and over are least likely to be the victims of violent crime, accounting for less than 2% of such victims, although older people represent 14.5% of the population.

We all know that even one such crime is one too many. That is why the draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to tackle crime and fear of crime against older and vulnerable people by more effective and appropriate sentences and by other measures. Although this is a new commitment, it is an area to which my Department was already giving significant focus. We have a range of strategies aimed at tackling crime and fear of crime among older and vulnerable people, and in the new community safety strategy, we intend to develop and improve those

strategies to build community confidence, encourage community involvement in crime prevention and reduce the fear of crime.

The new strategy will look at a range of options, including how we support inter-generational projects; support people through schemes such as neighbourhood watch; and provide peace of mind and security for older people. It will consider how to develop a wider understanding of the fear of crime in Northern Ireland and its particular impact on older and vulnerable people. It will also encourage engagement and communication with local communities through the new policing and community safety partnerships to help identify the support that communities need to tackle local concerns so that they can close the gap between actual and perceived levels of crime.

The Department of Justice is working towards publishing an agreed strategy with buy-in from other Departments and a range of other agencies early next year. In tandem with that work, Members will be aware that I have been considering a range of potential mechanisms by which greater transparency and consistency in sentencing, and understanding of sentencing practice, might be achieved. Sentencing is a complex issue and also an emotive one. It is an issue on which most people will have a view, particularly on the crimes that we have been discussing this afternoon against older or vulnerable people. My work on the development of a sentencing guidelines mechanism and my liaison with the Lord Chief Justice throughout the process has shown me that not enough is known about sentencing practice in our courts.

Therefore, officials from my Department are in discussions with the Justice Committee on draft proposals for ways in which transparency, consistency and an understanding of sentencing practice might be delivered in a manner that helps to promote public confidence. I hope to announce proposals on the way forward in that respect in the near future.

4.30 pm

In the meantime, I confirm to Members that the principles underlying sentencing, as expressed in sentencing guidelines, consider attacks on the vulnerable, including older people, an aggravating factor in sentencing decisions. That brings me to the focus of the debate: the call for mandatory prison sentences for those convicted of crimes against older and vulnerable people. All Members who spoke in the debate absolutely condemned recent attacks. I certainly agree with them that the punishment for anyone convicted of such attacks has to reflect the vulnerability of the victim and society's abhorrence of such crimes. However, sentencing in an individual case has to be a matter for the independent judiciary, immune from partisan or political interest.

In making sentencing decisions, the judiciary is guided by sentencing guidelines. Those guidelines indicate that the courts should include issues such as the vulnerability of the victim as an aggravating factor when assessing the appropriate sentence to be imposed. Let me quote from a Court of Appeal guideline judgement:

"It must be brought home to offenders who violate the privacy and security of old people in their homes and expose them to violence that immediate and heavy sentences of imprisonment will follow their detection and conviction."

I consider it important that the discretion of the judiciary is maintained in such cases. Mandatory minimum sentences of imprisonment allow no room for discretion, a point that was recognised by a number of Members who spoke. I think that that was everyone on this side of the House and Mr Hussey, although, for some bizarre reason, at the end of his speech, he said that he intended to support a motion that he had largely spoken against.

Mandatory sentences make no allowance for the exceptional case, and there is always the possibility of such cases. I confess that I was thinking of potential examples. However, yesterday, Jim Allister told me of the example of the paedophile pensioner, which he gave the House this afternoon. It is probably fair to say that, if Jim Allister were described as, "A 'Guardian'-reading, sandal-wearing liberal", he would feel a little discomfited. Such a description would not worry me but would worry him. Yet, Mr Allister, speaking from his clear, practical experience in the law courts put his finger on a precise example of why mandatory sentences are wrong. To suggest that the father in that case should be subjected to the same minimum sentence as a thug who assaults and abuses old people is absolutely ridiculous and was recognised as such by the silence in which he was heard before DUP Members desperately tried to think of something to heckle him with. We have the clear example cited, and we have heard others, including Mr McCartney, cite research from other jurisdictions that shows that mandatory minimum sentences can have unintended consequences. Indeed, Mr Allister's example would have been exact proof of that. That is why I and, I believe, the majority of the House have supported the concept of judicial discretion.

Members referred to sentencing guidelines. Of course, sentencing guidelines were raised as an issue in the Hillsborough Castle talks last year. At the time, some of us considered that a fairly formal mechanism was needed. However, there has been acknowledgement from different sides of the House today of the significant work being done by the Lord Chief Justice in developing informal sentencing guidelines and of his willingness to engage with laypeople involved in that process. Sir Declan Morgan's public consultation on the priorities for sentencing guidelines shows that he is in touch with public opinion. I welcome and support the work that he is doing. Some of the detailed issues around, for example, lay involvement, must be worked through in detail. However, it is absolutely clear that work is being done by the judiciary that complements the work being done by the Department, and Sir Declan Morgan's work is to be welcomed as a positive step forward.

The key issue for me is that we reassure vulnerable citizens that we promote safer communities and see that good work is done by police officers on the ground to ensure that criminals are caught. The knowledge that people will be caught and given an appropriate sentence by the judiciary is the deterrent — not the grandstanding and chest beating seen in the Chamber this afternoon — and it leads to judicial sentences that are appropriate to the facts of the case. In response to Mr McIlveen, Mr Allister highlighted the issue of an appeal against inadequate sentences, which is being looked at as part of the Attorney General's work.

I am committed, as the Programme for Government demonstrates, to continuing to work to ensure that crimes against older and vulnerable people are minimised,

that offenders convicted of such crimes continue to be sentenced appropriately and that older and vulnerable people are able to live their life free from the fear of crime. The approach of the Programme for Government is to explore the options and determine the need for appropriate legislation, with the kind of flexibility that Peter Weir talked about, as opposed to the inflexible demand for mandatory sentences that he and his party colleagues have been talking about.

It is incumbent on us all, whether we are political representatives or media commentators, to conduct this debate with care. As has been acknowledged, attacks on older people are, thankfully, rare. Although we should not be complacent and the Programme for Government commitment highlights the action that we are taking to reduce attacks and ensure appropriate sentences, it would be regrettable if our debate or media comments on this important issue were to add to older people's disquiet.

Let me say again that I have welcomed the opportunity to participate in the debate. It is clearly a significant issue to which, I suspect, we will return in Committee, in the Department or in the Assembly in the days to come. I wholeheartedly agree with the view expressed in every part of the House this afternoon that older and vulnerable people deserve respect and safety in their home. However, for the reasons that I have outlined, I oppose the motion to impose mandatory minimum sentences.

Mr Wells: First, I apologise that I was not here for the entire debate. We had a very important meeting of the Health Committee at which I had to stay until the bitter end, as it were, and I missed the first few contributions to the debate. However, I have been able to speak to some of my colleagues, and I think that there is a definite trend between those who have a concern for the elderly and the liberal tendency, led by the leader of the Alliance Party and the leader of the TUV. I never thought that I would be able to say that in the same sentence. Clearly, they are in cahoots. There has been collusion between the two of them to produce their common view on this matter. I never thought I would be able to say that either.

It is clear that everyone else in the House — SDLP, Sinn Féin, the Alliance Party — is of the view that there should be no mandatory sentencing. The public and the DUP believe that the only just punishment for the thugs who break into the homes of vulnerable elderly people is that they go to jail. I will quote the specific example of a lady who has passed away; I am sure that she would not mind me quoting her name. Emily Gorman was one of the most decent, godly people that I have ever met in my life. She was an inspiration to me and my children. She lived in an old Housing Executive rural cottage near the village of Moira, and it was broken into twice by thugs who ransacked her home and stole the very small number of earthly possessions of any value that she had. As a result, she had to leave a home that she had lived in for, I am sure, 60 years and move into sheltered accommodation. Is there anyone in this Chamber who believes that the thugs who did that do not deserve to go down for at least seven years? I cannot think of any reasonable person who would believe that.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I was very excited by the story that he told, but he did not finish it. What happened to the guys who carried out that

despicable act on that lady whom you admired so much? Were they caught and brought before the courts? That is the crux of the matter all through the debate. It is about catching those boys or girls.

Mr Wells: No, they were not caught. *[Interruption.]* Before the extreme moderates in the Alliance Party get too upset about this, I want to say that, if those thugs had known before they set out to do that evil deed that, if they were caught, they would get a mandatory prison sentence of seven years, they might well have decided not to go ahead with it. That is the point. All the honourable Members have totally missed the point that sentencing is not only a punishment; it is a deterrent. The honourable Member for North Antrim, whose legal opinion I respect — he has defended me in several difficult situations, as he will recall — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Storey: He has lost ones, too.

Mr Wells: He did a good job, generally. He makes the facetious point, however, that because we have a seven-year sentence we are less likely to detect people and get them to confess. The reality is that a seven-year sentence will neither help nor hinder the police in the detection of the crime; it will act as a deterrent to the crime. It will mean that, if the person is caught, there will be clear public confidence that that individual will be sent down.

Mr Allister: I do not recall that I ever said that there would be any inhibition on the police's likelihood of catching people because of the existence or presence of a mandatory sentence. I do not think that it affects that one way or the other. However, let us be clear: virtually every sentence carries a specific maximum term. Therefore, the person who robs knows that he could get a life sentence. The person who inflicts grievous bodily harm knows that he could get a life sentence with a minimum term. Now, under the 2008 order, there are extended sentences. Therefore, it is the existence of the upper limit, which is stiff in all those cases, that is the real deterrent, provided that it is adequately applied when people are sentenced.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Could I ask for all remarks to be made through the Chair, please?

Mr Wells: The difficulty that I have with that is that very seldom, if ever, is the maximum sentence applied. Let us look at the other side of the argument. The Member is right to say that there is no judicial sentencing for drink-driving. I accept that. However, you know that, if you leave a hotel or bar and you are over the limit and are caught, you will get a mandatory ban from driving for a minimum of one year. I have no doubt that that decision has meant that thousands and thousands of people have stopped at the door of a bar and got a taxi. They realised what the implications were, should they proceed.

Mr Allister: That is because there can be no excuse for drink-driving; therefore, a mandatory sentence is always equitable. However, if you talk about a mandatory sentence to incarcerate someone, you totally shut the door on the few exceptional cases when a sentence should not be imposed.

Mr Wells: In other words, we allow one or two cases per thousand to dictate our right to impose a mandatory sentence. The example that the Member quoted to me is an interesting one. He also gave it to Mr Ford. However, it is not the norm. The norm is that thugs burgle houses to

get money, such as in the incident that occurred the other night, when the life savings of an elderly, unmarried brother and sister were stolen. That is what goes on. I cannot see any circumstances that could be presented to any court in which that combination of breaking and entering, theft and attacking elderly pensioners could not be —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I will for the final time.

Mr Allister: Would the Member not be the first in the House to complain if a constituent of his such as I described got seven years for visiting some retribution on a paedophile who had attacked one of his children? The Member would be screaming, with great justification, about the inequity of that sentence. He would make the case that emerges with mandatory sentences, which is that, once you have them, you must take the rough with the smooth and you create as many problems as you solve. The answer is deterrent sentences in deserving cases, handed down by judges who know what they are doing.

Mr Wells: I have absolutely no doubt that, in those very unusual and particular circumstances, the DPP could take the decision to go for a lower-tariff offence. However, why should we forgo the opportunity to introduce a mandatory minimum sentence for the once-in-a-blue-moon situations when that might happen? We start from a base at which society does not have confidence in sentencing for attacks on elderly people. We must start with the premise that we want a seven-year mandatory sentence and work around those principles to produce legislation that will deal with that issue.

In addition to deterrence and punishment, sentencing creates public confidence in the judiciary. If the public are reassured and certain that there are firm guidelines on what is acceptable for sentencing and a firm rule that states that someone must be sent down for a certain period, the public will have confidence in the system. I do not believe that that confidence exists.

I accept that statistics show that there seems to have been a reduction in attacks on the elderly. However, that is absolutely no consolation to older people who are sitting in their home tonight in areas where those dreadful crimes have been committed recently. They are scared to go out of their front door. They are locked in a fortress mentality. They would be reassured to know that those who are responsible, if they are caught, will face a very difficult time.

4.45 pm

The honourable Member for North Antrim perhaps has still not departed from his role as a QC. Perhaps he wants to return to that noble profession some day and so wants to ride both horses to some extent. However, the public demand action. Hold an opinion poll on the streets today and ask the voters, the ratepayers and the people of Northern Ireland what they think about this issue, and the views of Mr McCrea, Mr Allister and Mr Ford will get less than 5% support.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I certainly will.

Mr Agnew: Victim Support and Age NI have not called for mandatory sentences. The only call that I am aware of for

mandatory sentences before today's debate was from 'The Stephen Nolan Show', and I do not think that we should implement Nolan justice in this House.

Mr Wells: The public, particularly the elderly, will be shocked that people are jumping up from every corner of this Assembly to find a way of avoiding mandatory sentences. It is noticeable that those Members are out of line with their constituents' views on the issue. Go back to the leafy suburbs of North Down, Mr Agnew, and ask your electorate, particularly the elderly, what they think of the issue, and you will get a very different message. Therefore, I have absolutely no qualms about supporting the motion entirely. We will push it to a vote, and the people of Northern Ireland will watch with interest to see which Lobby Members go through.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. Will the Member not agree that elderly and vulnerable people want assurance that the PSNI has the appropriate resources to catch people and a reputation for putting them before the courts?

Mr Wells: They will all go to jail after that process ends.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret to advise the Member that his time is up and that we must proceed.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 44; Noes 41.

AYES

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr Craig.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr A Maginness.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that older and vulnerable people are deserving of respect and safety in their homes; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce legislation to impose mandatory minimum prison sentences for people who are found guilty of violent crimes against older or vulnerable people.

5.00 pm

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Employment Services Board

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and all other Members who wish to speak will have six minutes on this occasion.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Committee for supporting this topic and selecting it for the Adjournment debate tonight. I also thank the Minister for his attendance.

The importance of this debate is very relevant due to the fact that only last week the Westminster report on unemployment was released. That report highlights the high unemployment rates in the areas that we will speak about this evening. Some of the highlights in the report put a spotlight on the need for a more localised approach to addressing unemployment in west Belfast and the greater Shankill. The infrastructure is already there through the structures of the Employment Services Board (ESB), the employers' forum and other task force initiatives, which have already assisted in moving west Belfast and the greater Shankill forward.

I will take a bit of time to highlight some of the benefits that the task force has brought to west Belfast and the greater Shankill over the past number of years. The health employment programme works in partnership with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, UNISON, the Employment Services Board and the employers' forum. It helped to get over 150 people into employment, and over 300 people received progression training, 40 of whom moved on to more advanced positions, creating £1.4 million per annum for the local economy.

The social economy fund — a £1 million fund — has created 31 posts that will be supported for two years in 14 social enterprises that provide local services of community benefit. The Contact Centre Job 100 initiative worked with local contact centre employers to ring-fence 100 jobs for those further from the labour market. Over 150 people have moved into employment in the contact centre sector as a direct result.

There has been the development of highly significant government guidance through the political ex-prisoners' group, chaired by Sir George Quigley, and a new working group set up by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

An innovative scheme in Bombardier offered adult apprenticeships to people from the task force areas with few entry requirements reduced. The Engineering Skills for Industry scheme, funded by Bombardier, the European social fund and the Department for Employment and Learning's

(DEL) Steps to Work programme, is an innovative approach that provides additional help and support for those further from the labour market to gain qualifications and then employment in the engineering sector.

There have been construction cluster initiatives. Despite the severe impact that there has been on the construction industry, the task force structures have worked extensively with the employers' forum construction cluster to provide a series of work placement opportunities, linkages with local schools, mock interview programmes, and so on.

There have been direct interventions with retail employers to develop approaches and place clients, including Marks and Spencer, Timberland, IKEA, Asda and Tesco, to name but a few. The task force has also helped through the development of key approaches to maximise opportunities in areas such as Victoria Square and the Titanic Square in east Belfast.

The work of the task force structures has levered in substantial additional resources for employment and employability initiatives, with over £2 million in additional funding having been secured in the past seven years. DEL investment in the stakeholder forum element of the Employment Services Board has been match-funded almost pound for pound by the private sector through the support of the employers' forum. Since mid-2009, DEL has sought to separate the activities of the Employment Services Board into those contracted under the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) and those that fall under the task force's remit.

In his letter of 31 January 2011, Minister Danny Kennedy noted that DEL funded the Employment Services Board from April 2007 to act as a facilitator for the Belfast-wide LEMIS stakeholder forum and that, since 2007, it has not provided the Employment Services Board with resources to discharge any or all of its functions in respect of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces. DEL's definition of the services contracted under LEMIS has a very narrow focus and excludes the majority of what I have just mentioned.

With that in mind, the Employment Services Board's role in acting as a co-ordinating body for services and approaches to tackle employability and unemployment across west Belfast and the greater Shankill is at substantial risk. The recent task force consultations, along with direct consultation with neighbourhood renewal partnerships, have demonstrated widespread support for the Employment Services Board not only to continue but to strengthen its pivotal role in the development of a new strategy and associated action plan to tackle employability and unemployment in the task force areas.

The Employment Services Board is currently supported by Belfast City Council, which has committed £45,000 of interim funding. That support, although providing an essential lifeline, does not fully cover the board's very modest ongoing operating costs. The support from Belfast City Council ends on 31 December 2011 and will leave an overall shortfall of £32,000 until the end of March 2012.

The Department's lack of support for the Employment Services Board and its narrow focus on services to facilitate a stakeholder forum for LEMIS, as opposed to its wider task force remit, is a barrier, given that the evaluation of the last LEMIS recommended not proceeding with the shareholder

forum element in the new LEMIS contract. It is important to note that all the Employment Services Board activities are employability related, fit in with DEL's remit and were embarked on to open up opportunities and overcome barriers to employment for those further from the labour market in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces areas.

All the Employment Services Board's work is directly in employment and employability, and is therefore within DEL's remit and in support of its aims and objectives. Whether funded directly for that work, the benefits are clearly there to be seen, with over £2 million in additional resources brought in by the employers' forum and the Employment Services Board.

There is no alternative to the stakeholder forum arrangements in place for LEMIS, and we have therefore taken a massive step backwards when it comes to government working with local communities and stakeholders to tackle unemployment collaboratively. The LEMIS evaluation did not consider that wider range of benefits and very narrowly focused on the administration of the stakeholder forum function rather than on the supporting developmental work.

New plans for tackling unemployment and disadvantage are currently being developed in west Belfast and the greater Shankill. The Employment Services Board is a key driver in that respect and has the full support of both partnerships, as well as that of the neighbourhood renewal partnerships.

With that in mind, I believe that the decision to withdraw the stakeholder forum function was based on a very short-sighted and narrow assessment that did not take account of the unique structures, arrangements and subsequent benefits to west Belfast and the greater Shankill. There is a greater case than ever to support such structures. Losing the Employment Services Board at this stage will place a great question mark over the commitment and investment by the private sector in the employers' forum, and I do not think that that is the message that we want to send out.

The short-term investment required is £32,000 to the end of March. I ask the Minister to look at his budget in the hope that he can find that small amount of money to assist west Belfast and the greater Shankill. Granting that small amount of finance would allow the Employment Services Board to seek other funding revenues to keep up its work.

The programme works, Minister. Therefore I would be very grateful if you could source that small amount of money as a lifeline to the community. I realise that budgets are very tight, but I would like to hear your response. I look at some of the positive work: Invest NI has invested £1.5 million in the Andor Technology site on the Springfield Road, which levers in other money to a total of £1.8 million investment in that area last week. I would be very grateful if the Minister could add on the small amount of £32,000 — if he has it in his budget — as it would allow the work of the Employment Services Board to continue trying to give employment opportunities to people from some of the most disadvantaged areas.

Mr Humphrey: I declare at the outset that I am a former member of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force, a member of the Greater Shankill Partnership Board and a member of Belfast City Council. The Employers' Forum and the Employment Services Board basically came out

of those task forces. The Employment Services Board has been providing a service in greater Shankill, and particularly in west Belfast.

One of the most significant things for those involved in the Employment Services Board was the Health Employment Partnership, which was jointly funded by DEL and the Belfast Trust. Last year, I attended an event in the Long Gallery with my colleague from Belfast City Council Tim Attwood. When we returned to the council we proposed and seconded a motion respectively in support of that. It is a great scheme. People at the event gave testimony about how the project had lifted them in relation to meaningful employment, gave them confidence in themselves and totally transformed them as individuals. I am saddened to hear that there may not be money to allow it to continue, although the Minister may correct me if I am wrong. It is unfortunate, to say the least, if that is the case.

Engineering with young people from Bombardier Aerospace has an impact on training, as does Springvale, on respective sides of the divide in west Belfast. Impact Training has been vital for the young people in the area that I and others in the Chamber represent. The proposer of the debate said that Belfast City Council has been providing some funding through the development department for ESB to help the greater Shankill and west Belfast. The initial funding was for three months, and then extended for a further six months due to the failure of distribution from this place.

The board's work has been vital, although I must be honest and say that I would have liked to see more of it in the Shankill. We need a holistic approach to tackling problems in areas such as west Belfast and the wards of north Belfast that abut it. We hear about the difficulties in hard-to-reach communities for Protestants and Catholics. Many young people feel that they simply have no way out because the job prospects are not there. Unfortunately, in some families, education is not valued. The focus of the national Government and its predecessor seems to be education, education, education.

Education is not for everyone. Some people make the decision not to go into third-level education, as I did; I went straight into industry. Other people want to learn the traditional trades. We do not have enough people training to be electricians, joiners, plumbers, bricklayers and so on, which is what the economy needs. The manufacturing base may have contracted now, but will we be fit for purpose if we have economic growth and manufacturing recovers?

5.15 pm

Some 50% of the people who built Victoria Square a number of years ago are from Poland. I have no difficulty with that, but why are people from the Short Strand, the Shankill, west Belfast and north Belfast not getting opportunities to go in there and do that work? The simple truth is that they do not have the skills because the training is not there. There is a great responsibility on the Minister's Department and Belfast Metropolitan College to teach the skills that are needed in those communities. That will give those people a lift and the opportunity to go into the world of work and get meaningful long-term employment that will give them confidence and vision for the future.

The threat of the withdrawal of funding from organisations such as ESB is a particular concern. I am not sure that

Belfast City Council has the funding to make up the shortfall in its entirety, nor do I think that it is appropriate that it should do that. Belfast City Council can certainly work and support these organisations in partnership, but responsibility resides with regional government.

It is a particular problem in the greater Shankill area. Connectivity between Belfast Metropolitan College and the greater Shankill is very poor. It is very difficult for young people who go to that college. Recently, I was visited by a constituent who is supposed to be on a placement, training to be a mechanic. The car mechanic with whom he works has him changing tyres. That young fella has no prospect of becoming a mechanic if he is only changing tyres. If such courses were focused and directed in a professional way, it would allow people to get qualifications.

People who work in the Employment Services Board and on Jobskills programmes in the greater Shankill have much to do. They do good work, and they should be supported in that ongoing work. If the money can be found, not just from the Department but through working in partnership with the private sector and Belfast City Council, I implore the Minister to ensure that those schemes continue.

We can talk about education and a lack of training, especially vocational training. However, the truth is that we simply will not crack it unless a holistic, joined-up, collaborative approach is taken to tackling the problems in west Belfast, north Belfast and so on. I am concerned when I hear about school closures and reductions in education funding and vocational training in those areas. How will we instil in those people confidence that there is any prospect of meaningful employment if government does not work collaboratively with councils and the private sector? All those elements need to come together to ensure that the process works.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Alex Attwood. Members have a maximum of seven minutes, as a few names have been withdrawn.

Mr Attwood: I welcome Paul Maskey's Adjournment debate. There was not a word in his opening remarks that I differ from. There was virtually not a word in William Humphrey's remarks that I differ from. I hope that there will be barely a word in my remarks that either of them differ from, but we will wait and see about that.

Minister, there are four reasons why you should back this project in the next half hour. The first is the reason that Paul Maskey outlined: it is a good project with good results and a good future. Given its profile and success, the Department should think about providing funding. Secondly, as has been outlined, the amount of money that is sought in the period to the end of this financial year is moderate. As I will explain, other models of practice have been deployed over the past number of months to sustain good projects while potential funding opportunities emerge. Thirdly, there is an orthodoxy in DEL that needs to be broken, which is that mainstream programmes and models in the image of London programmes best serve the interest of communities. I do not think that that is the right orthodoxy. I have long believed that, at times, the conservative and insular thinking of DEL gets in the way of the deployment of best practice, such as the Employment Services Board. Fourthly, I am being cautious in making this argument, but there is a

need to reassure communities in West Belfast after the decision that was announced yesterday on the review of teacher training. Whatever the ambition and intention of the Minister in that regard, there is now new uncertainty in West Belfast about the Government's commitment to it. As a consequence, I believe that those four reasons give opportunity and space for the Minister to address the matter this afternoon.

I endorse what Paul Maskey and William Humphrey said about some of the initiatives that have arisen through the work of the Employment Services Board. I will name only two or three because they have been spoken about in some detail. The health employment programme is not just a good model; it is actually a model that should be deployed in all areas of disadvantage in the North. We have the single biggest employer in the public sector, with the single biggest spend in the public sector — namely, health — and there is a local model of identifying people in areas of neighbourhood renewal, training them up to apply for jobs in the health service and, at the same time, helping people in low-level employment with the health service to upskill in order to progress into higher jobs in the health service.

William Humphrey, my brother and others were in the Long Gallery because the programme is representative and has wider deployment in terms of DEL and the Department for Social Development (DSD) strategy, and it is a classic example of where we should go. It is a project that should be escalated, not put in jeopardy through the uncertainty around the Employment Services Board. The same can be said for all the other initiatives that came through the ESB, which Paul Maskey outlined in his speech, including construction cluster initiatives, direct retail interventions and, more than anything else, social economy projects.

Some 5% of employment in the North is in social economy projects. That is a model of employment, given that it is not for profit and money goes back into the business. It is a business; it is not charity, and it is not handouts. It is a business model in the image of not for profit and social economy projects, which have a greater great role, especially if we can get to grips with our procurement.

As I said, there were models in the recent past where the Government decided to intervene in order to protect good programmes at a moment of high risk. I refer in particular to the integrated services project in West Belfast. When I was Minister for Social Development, we released short-term funding to get that project over the funding gap while further funding opportunities came forward. Although I have grave concerns about the social investment fund and believe that money should be reallocated very quickly, especially to DSD and perhaps to DEL to take forward various programmes, nonetheless, for the sake of £30,000 to cover a short deficit in funding while other funding models are worked up — or, as I prefer to see it, funding that is in the Budget is reallocated to those best placed in government to deploy those resources, namely DEL and DSD, to neighbourhood renewal projects — I do not think that this project should be put in any further jeopardy beyond the conclusion of this debate.

I encourage the Minister to break free of the technocratic culture that prevails in some elements of DEL and to recognise this afternoon's cross-party, cross-community endorsement of the project. I also encourage him to recognise that this is not just good in itself but is a

trailblazer for good models of creating employment, skills and opportunities for people in areas of neighbourhood renewal. I further encourage him to send a good news message to all the people of West Belfast.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I congratulate Paul Maskey on securing the Adjournment debate, and I thank the Members who spoke for their comments. I will certainly take note of everything that has been said.

It might be helpful if I explained the nature of my Department's relationship with the Employment Services Board and how my Department procures programmes and services. My Department does not core fund organisations; rather, the normal practice is to procure specific programmes or services by competitive tender.

My Department has had two contracts with the Employment Services Board. The first was to support targeted initiatives for the long-term unemployed in West Belfast and the greater Shankill. That contractual relationship ended in 2007, when targeted initiatives ended. More recently, my Department provided funding for the Employment Services Board to act as the secretariat for the Belfast stakeholder forum for the Local Employment Intermediary Service, better known as LEMIS, and forums were funded in Derry and Strabane.

During the latter part of 2009, my Department commissioned FGS McClure Watters to evaluate LEMIS. That evaluation concluded that LEMIS is a low-cost, highly effective intervention that helps those who are most disengaged from the labour market to reconnect with the world of work. It also concluded that there was no longer a need for the stakeholder forums and that to continue with them would simply be a duplication of functions already being delivered by others, such as my Department, the workforce development forums and local councils.

I should say at the outset that I value stakeholder engagement. My Department is working closely with Belfast City Council and other key organisations, including other Departments, agencies and educational institutions, to secure a strategic approach for the whole city of Belfast. I believe that we must break free from our traditional views of the city. That view breaks the city down into discrete areas — north, south, east and west — and weakens us all and fragments interventions. I think that we need to view the city as a whole and seek strategic solutions that will provide opportunities for all our citizens and build the cohesion and strength of the whole community in Belfast. I also believe that we can do that at little or no additional cost. At times of financial constraint, that can only be the right thing to do.

In line with the recommendations of the FGS McClure Watters evaluation report, funding was withdrawn from the LEMIS stakeholder forum in March 2011. The £150,000 that was saved by that decision has been directly reinvested into front line services by extending LEMIS to three more areas of Northern Ireland. In addition to being provided in Belfast, Derry and Strabane, LEMIS is now available in Cookstown, Moyle and Newry. Those areas have been identified as being the next three most deprived parts of Northern Ireland under the Noble indices.

I am sure that Members will agree that that extension of LEMIS should be warmly welcomed. We must do all that we can at this difficult time to help people prepare for a move into work as quickly as possible. The principle of reducing

unnecessary overhead costs and redirecting much-needed resources to front line services is very much in evidence in our extension of LEMIS.

Tomorrow, I will visit Ballycastle, where Network Personnel, one of our LEMIS contractors, will open new premises to deliver LEMIS in north Antrim. Locally, the service will be branded as Source. If LEMIS performs as well in the new areas as it has in Belfast, Derry and Strabane, we can expect around 100 extra people to find and retain work in the next year to 18 months.

My Department has no particular locus in the question of future funding for the Employment Services Board. Others, notably the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department for Social Development, may have a view, given their involvement on the Employment Services Board in the work of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill task forces, which are, of course, structures established by those Departments.

5.30 pm

With regard to my Department's wider commitment to west Belfast and the greater Shankill, the full range of employment service programmes and services remains in place. Those services and programmes can be accessed through the local jobs and benefits office network in our Andersonstown, Falls and Shankill offices. The Andersonstown office, which was opened last year, is one of the newest jobs and benefits offices in the network and offers the local community a comprehensive jobs and benefits service. I have over 100 staff working in those locations, providing information, advice and support across the whole client range from jobseekers and job changers to those with health conditions and disabilities.

In September 2011 — the latest month for which I have data — my staff helped over 250 people to move into employment in those areas. That is indeed a positive recognition of the support that they received from the employment service. In addition, the full suite of employment programmes is in place and available to customers in those areas. Those include the Steps to Work programme, which is our main adult back-to-work programme, and the full range of disability programmes offered by the Disability Employment Service.

LEMIS contracts also remain in place in west Belfast and greater Shankill. We have two contracts in the area: Upper Springfield Development Trust delivers the service in west Belfast, while Impact Training, via the Shankill Job Assist Centre, offers the service in the Shankill area. LEMIS is an area-specific initiative, designed to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged in our most disadvantaged areas. It is worth noting that LEMIS continues to perform well in those areas, even after the withdrawal of funding from the stakeholder forums. In the first six months of the 2010-11 financial year, 50 LEMIS clients moved into work in the west Belfast and greater Shankill areas. In the same period this year, 59 clients found work. That is a remarkable performance, given the persistent difficulties in the labour market. I strongly suggest that my Department is doing all it can within the resources available to it to address worklessness, not only in west Belfast but right across the Province.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Recently, I met the manager of the Shankill Job Assist

Centre, and I meet him regularly. He told me that many of the people who come to his office on the Shankill Road travel from south and east Belfast. That backs up the point that Mr Attwood made that the scheme has been so successful in the Shankill that it should be rolled out across the city, especially in urban working-class areas where there are very high levels of unemployment and very low levels of educational attainment.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Humphrey for his comments. It is important to distinguish between programmes and structures. The message that I am trying to give is that the Department wants to invest in programmes and to do that on the basis of the evidence of what works and avoiding what does not work. I took on board his comments earlier about the problems of skills shortages and skills mismatches and the inability of people to take up jobs on their immediate doorstep. Those are all issues that I am extremely mindful of and want to return to the House with in the near future.

Members may also be aware that the employment service is carrying out a thorough review of provision to determine whether the current offering remains fit for purpose. In the new year, I expect to see major improvements both in the direct service offered to customers by front line staff and in the development of Steps to Work. In the coming weeks, we will go to market to procure a new programme for people with health conditions and disabilities. Work Connect, which will replace the new deal for disabled people, will help those with low-level support needs to connect with the world of work. That will be particularly helpful for those going through the incapacity benefit reassessment process.

I will ensure that the employment service keeps all services and provision under review, with a view to maximising the quality and effectiveness of what we offer within the budget available. However, we can always do more. My Department has plans for a range of new initiatives, including a variation of the Step Ahead initiative targeted at 500 young unemployed people; an individual place-and-train scheme for people with learning disabilities; a self-employment initiative for the creative industries; and a variation on existing LEMIS provision to provide family support workers in each area to help address the wider barriers to work faced by families. Of course, all those new initiatives will cost money, and my Department has bid to the social protection fund for funding for them. We await the outcome of that bidding process.

The Assembly would do well to debate unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, in the very near future. Other jurisdictions have responded to the challenge, and we must do likewise. I believe that our Programme for Government and economic strategy will only provide the necessary solutions if we come together to forge collectively new possibilities for young people.

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

Mr Attwood: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Farry: I am out of time, I think.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister is correct: we are now out of time.

Adjourned at 5.37 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 5 December 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I raise with you again the issue of the delay — indeed, the neglect — in answering questions for written answer. It is a matter with which you have been helpful in the past, but the problem persists. At this moment, I have 40 questions for written answer that have passed the 10-day requirement for answer. Six of them are questions that were tabled before the summer recess, 12 of them were tabled in September and nine of them were tabled in October.

If Members are to do the work that they are sent here to do, the Standing Order requirement of Ministers attending to answers within 10 days needs to be adhered to. Twenty of the 40 questions relate to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and 11 to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Those two Departments seem to be particularly remiss at living within the mandatory requirements of Standing Order 20B. I again ask for your guidance and your assistance in the resolution of the matter.

Mr Speaker: I say to the Member and the whole House that I do have great sympathy for Members on this issue. That is why I have continually allowed Members to raise these issues, particularly by making points of order in the House. The House will know that I have no real powers under Standing Order 20B. However, I hope that, by Members raising the matter through points of order, Ministers listen to what is being said in the House, because various Members have raised the same issue. I have great sympathy for Members who raise such issues through points of order. I will continue to allow Members to raise them through points of order until Ministers listen very closely to what Members say.

I have some deep concerns about the way in which this is being handled by Departments, and the Member is certainly right to raise it. As I said, I hope that Ministers in the Departments concerned are listening. Let us now move on, please.

Before we begin today's business, I advise Members that the two statements that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development was to deliver today have been postponed until next Monday. I received a letter from the Minister in which she indicated clearly that she had been called to attend a very urgent meeting in Brussels. I know that all the party Whips have been informed of the situation.

Executive Committee Business

Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

*That the Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General)
(Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be
approved.*

I am seeking the Assembly's approval of these amending regulations that were made on 18 July 2011 and that came into operation on 14 August. Members may find it helpful if I outline the background to the regulations. In October 2010, following an extensive consultation process, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) brought into operation a large body of legislation, comprising a total of 12 statutory rules, the purpose of which was to introduce the right to additional paternity leave and additional statutory paternity pay.

The package of new entitlements, collectively referred to as the additional paternity leave and pay regulations, provides greater choice for working parents in how they divide childcare responsibilities. One of the statutory rules, the Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, allows employed earners to be paid additional statutory paternity pay if they are not working during their partner's maternity or adoption pay period. Subsequent to those regulations coming into operation, officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills advised my Department that the corresponding regulations in Great Britain contained a minor drafting error, and it was quickly ascertained that the error had been replicated in the Northern Ireland regulations.

The intention has always been that additional statutory paternity pay should not begin earlier than 20 weeks after a child's placement for adoption. That reflects the provisions that apply to births, where additional statutory paternity pay cannot begin earlier than 20 weeks after a child is born. The intended position is reflected in the explanatory note to the original regulations, which states that the provisions on additional statutory paternity pay for adopters correspond to the provisions on additional paternity pay for the husbands and partners of mothers of newborn children. That is also reflected in the guidance issued after the original regulations were made. However, regulation 14 of the Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) Regulations

(Northern Ireland) 2010 appears to allow the impractical scenario of additional paternity pay in adoption cases beginning 20 weeks before a child is placed for adoption.

The proposed technical amendment to regulation 14 will ensure that the intended position is achieved. A similar amendment has already been effected in Great Britain. I am grateful to the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Examiner of Statutory Rules for their scrutiny of the amending statutory rule. I am also grateful to the Committee for its recommendation that the regulations be confirmed by the Assembly. I hope that I have provided the House with sufficient explanation of the purpose of the regulations. I will, of course, respond to any points made by Members in my closing remarks.

Mr Speaker: No Members have indicated that they want to speak on the issue. I think that the Chairman of the Committee, Basil McCrea, intended to speak, but he is not in the Chamber. I, therefore, call on the Minister to conclude.

Dr Farry: I thank all the Members who contributed. If only things could be this easy in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Draft Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

That the draft Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Again, it may be helpful if I outline briefly for Members the background to the order. In March 2011, the Assembly passed the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which fundamentally changed the procedures and systems for resolving workplace disputes in Northern Ireland. One of the most significant measures related to the repeal of statutory grievance procedures and their replacement by good practice standards that are set out in the Labour Relations Agency's (LRA) revised code of practice.

In order to encourage observation of best practices, the Act also inserted provisions into the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 that allow industrial tribunals to vary awards by up to 50%, up or down, where the tribunal considers that either party has unreasonably failed to apply such standards. Also inserted into the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 was a schedule that detailed the employment law jurisdictions to which the revised grievance procedures would apply. Many of those jurisdictions are well known. They include unfair dismissal or forms of unlawful discrimination. Others are less common, but no less important.

It transpires that, due to an oversight in the GB legislation, which has been replicated in the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, one of the least-used jurisdictions was omitted from the schedule. The jurisdiction in question is regulation 51 of the Companies (Cross-Border Mergers) Regulations 2007. That regulation enables certain employees and their representatives to make a complaint to an industrial tribunal where they have been subject to detriment for exercising certain rights and entitlements in the context of a cross-border merger.

The potential ramifications of that omission are that, were such a complaint to be made, the tribunal would be unable to vary any award to reflect non-compliance with the LRA code. Although, in practice, cross-border merger cases of that type are likely to be extremely rare, it is nevertheless appropriate to correct that omission. I should point out that the amendment is of a purely technical nature. It does not represent any change in policy.

I am grateful to the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Examiner of Statutory Rules for their scrutiny of that particular statutory rule. I hope that I have provided the House with sufficient explanation of the purpose of the order. I will, of course, respond to any points that are made by Members in my closing remarks.

Mr Speaker: Once again, no Members have indicated that they want to speak to the motion. Therefore, I call the Minister to conclude the debate.

Dr Farry: Again, I thank Members for their understanding of the situation.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Community Transport Scheme

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

Mr McMullan: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the dependency that our rural communities have on the community transport scheme for medical visits and hospital appointments; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to ensure that this service is sustained to facilitate the most vulnerable people in our society.

I ask the Assembly to support rural dwellers having the same access to community transport as that which urban dwellers enjoy, primarily with regard to hospital appointments.

In 2011, new contracts were made in the community transport scheme, with the obvious exclusion of transport to hospital appointments. This is an issue of equality. I have spoken to many people who have been affected greatly. That is what they tell me. At present, people who live in urban areas can get to hospital appointments with the Door-2-Door service while, in rural areas, community transport can now only drop people to the nearest bus stop or train station and leave them to get on their way. In many cases, in my area of east Antrim and the glens, people have to take three buses.

I spoke to two ladies at the weekend. One of them was virtually in tears when she told me about her situation. At present, she pays anything between £50 and £60 for a taxi to take her to and from hospital. She is 84 years old, yet we expect her to be left at the bus stop on a winter's morning to get buses to Ballymena and then to Belfast, and to wait in between. That is intolerable in this day and age.

12.15 pm

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the Member, but could he pull his microphone closer? Thank you.

Mr McMullan: Sorry. Community transport can be used for all sorts of things such as shopping and visits to local GPs, post offices, family members and to those in hospital, and I welcome that. However, the big problem for rural areas is the use of the phrase "local hospitals" in the original agreement in 1996. Today, there are no local hospitals in rural areas; they do not exist and most are now referred to as health centres or clinics.

Access to community transport to visit friends or family in mainstream hospitals is a great advantage for rural dwellers, and the service must be kept up. I fully support that, and I am sure that the House does as well. However, there is no sense in not allowing community transport for hospital appointments when visits to hospital are allowed. All of the Departments need to sit down and find a solution to this problem. It is not just up to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) — the Department of Health, Social

Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and all of the other Departments also need to be involved.

We cannot allow this difference between urban dwellers and their rural neighbours. After all, in its booklet, the Community Transport Association suggests that rural community transport exists to assist with the reduction of rural isolation and to target social need.

Community transport was introduced in 1996 — 15 years ago. Health provision has moved on since then, services have been centralised and local or community hospitals have been closed and put to other uses. Practically all major outpatient services are now centralised in urban areas. Those include services for patients with renal problems, cancer and special needs, to name a few. The use of community transport for those patients is not an option. We cannot allow pensioners who are maybe 80 years old, those with disabilities and those with special needs to go out and look for private transport to take them to their appointments. As I said before, some of these people must go to hospital two or three times a week, and we cannot expect them to pay that money or, as happens, to beg lifts from their neighbours. It makes no sense at all.

Public transport has been rationalised time and again in rural areas, and timetables do not suit the majority of rural dwellers. One of the questions that should be asked is that if the timetables are being made by transport providers, why can hospital appointments not be set at a time to suit the timetables? That is never done. People are given appointments in hospitals at 10.00 am. How can anyone from where I live in Cushendall in the glens of Antrim get to Belfast for 10.00 am or 11.00 am? It is virtually impossible. Two or three people will need to go with some of those patients to look after them on public transport.

There has also been a reduction in non-emergency health transport. In the past, patients like those I mentioned and who had difficulty accessing public transport, could be transported using non-emergency ambulances or minibuses. Those were provided by the Ambulance Service or by local health trusts, but budget cuts and the review of the Ambulance Service have reduced the ability of the health service to provide patient transport.

It would be interesting to see the figures for the number of patients who have not attended their appointments in each health trust. In my area in the glens, which is serviced by North Coast Community Transport Partnership, the figures for trips for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 was 1,060, yet between 1 April and 1 September 2011 the figure had reduced by 253. Including other trips, there was a total drop of 600 trips for that community for the current year, including a weekly drop of 12 hospital trips. It is alarming to think about where those people have gone, and how many of them have missed their hospital appointments.

There is a figure that is accepted as a benchmark: a missed hospital appointment costs about £150. When all the missed appointments are added up, a lot of money is being wasted because of this transport debacle.

We need to look at a better strategy. That is why I am asking the Minister for Regional Development to sit down with the Health Minister and anyone else who can be included to find a solution to this serious problem of rural social isolation. Do we really expect 80-year-olds to go out and look for

bus services at that time of the morning to get to their appointments?

How much will this cost? I have talked to the transport people in my area and I have been told that it would cost £25,000 to reinstate the North Coast Community Transport scheme to allow patients to travel to hospital appointments. I know that the Ministers have been very good in the past, and I do not doubt that they will be very good in future. I ask them to look at this issue. I am the parent of a disabled child who goes to regular hospital appointments in Belfast because of her condition. What is she going to do when she is 18 or 19? I could not allow my child to go on the bus, because two people have to go with her.

In the rural areas, as you know, most families have one car. Those cars are used to get to work by those who are lucky enough to have a job. The community transport scheme is a lifeline. There are people who give up their time to volunteer to drive. We are losing out on those volunteers, and they should be brought back in. I ask the Minister to talk to the other Departments and put the service back on. That is my plea on behalf of those who used the service before and cannot use it now. It is a vital service for rural dwellers.

Mr Beggs: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “medical visits” and insert

“and access to other local services; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work closely with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that this service is sustained to facilitate the most vulnerable people in our society.”

I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing the important topic of community transport up for debate today. It is particularly important in rural areas, where, unfortunately, economics dictate that we cannot have as regular a bus service as we would wish for. Therefore, alternative means have to be used to address rural isolation. I believe that North Coast Community Transport in north Antrim, as has been mentioned, and South Antrim Community Transport provide an important service, which has not been highlighted as much as it should have been. There may yet be people who might avail themselves of the service but need to find out more about it and how it can assist them.

My reason for tabling the amendment was to highlight the fact that rural isolation and transport problems are not simply the responsibility of one Department; their effects are much wider. There are many transport issues that are already supported by a range of Departments, and I hope to highlight that during this discussion.

Over the weekend, I decided to check how I would get to Antrim Area Hospital this morning if I had to do so. Several years ago, I took up a challenge by the Consumer Council to get to that hospital by 10.00 am. I live about three miles from Larne, between Larne and Carrickfergus, and I had to set out on foot at 6.30 am to do that. Not everyone would be able to do that, but that is the sort of thing that can easily happen in a rural community. Translink's journey planner indicated that the best, indeed, the only route this morning, using the nearest bus service, would be the Gleno bus at 8.21 am. Eventually, having travelled

via Larne, Belfast and Templepatrick, I would get to Antrim Area Hospital by 10.54 am. That is the public transport alternative. I appreciate that it is not possible to have a bus service that takes everyone where they wish to go, but alternatives have to be found.

There are many individuals who live in my rural constituency in places such as Islandmagee, Carnlough and the glens, which were mentioned earlier, for whom, even if they are just a few miles from the main bus service, it may prove impractical. They may not be able to avail themselves of that service.

It is a big issue, and, as I have said, there is a complex range of funders. The Department for Regional Development is clearly the key funder in supporting the Community Transport Association, and I noted that the draft Budget earlier this year proposed to reduce its funding even though it is carrying out that vital work. I was pleased that it was realised subsequently that that is an important service in the rural community and that money was found for it.

In addition, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety provides transport in the rural setting. There is the patient transport scheme, but to qualify for it, medical practitioners have to indicate that there is a need for it, and a person must have medical needs to justify using it. So, it has great limitations that prevent people qualifying. There is also a hospital travel cost scheme, and I noticed earlier that in answer to oral questions on 8 November, the Minister expressed concern that the transport area in general is causing problems for him. However, the hospital travel cost scheme applies to those on low income and on certain social security benefits. I am not sure that everyone is as aware of it as they should be, and we need to ensure that that is corrected so that those who qualify utilise that source.

Mr McMullan: Will the Member agree that, on the travel costs to the doctors, the emphasis on the consultant in the hospital to sign the forms to show that a person was there ties up the consultants with paperwork and is not necessary? Does he also agree that the money received is based on public transport costs and, sometimes, when the person takes private transport, the difference has to be paid by that person?

Mr Beggs: I have a concern that consultants may not be as available as they should be to approve the necessary paperwork. However, someone should approve that. We have to create audit trails to avoid fraud, so some method should be found to efficiently enable that to happen. We certainly do not want consultants, given their wealth of experience and the pressures that they are under, to be doing bureaucratic duties.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has widened community transport access to all senior citizen card holders and is providing a subsidy to do that. I am trying to show that a range of Departments come together in a piecemeal way and can contribute to the overall transport in the rural community. Indeed, the briefing from the Research and Information Service — I thank it for that — includes an interesting document that shows that community transport is picking up cocktail funding from DSD, the old LSPs, Europe and perhaps even from a wider range of Departments. So, the purpose of my amendment

was to highlight that funding arrangements for transport in rural areas are, to a degree, piecemeal at present and that an overview is needed. The best place for that responsibility is perhaps the Department of Finance and Personnel, which, ultimately, controls the strings and determines how much money goes into particular budget areas, which can dictate the level of service. Hence my amendment tries to widen the range of the debate, because it is a real issue that affects many Departments, and, if we want to get a solution, it is important that we take it all into consideration and bring it all together.

The Community Transport Association's 'State of the Sector' report 2010 indicates that:

"There is no formal action plan for transport within DHSSPS however the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Boards recognise access to health as a concern."

As has been mentioned earlier, we have had a problem with non-attendance at many hospital appointments, where specialised staff who cost considerable amounts of money are in attendance. Those very large numbers of no-shows are very costly.

Again, there is a need to identify whether that is part of the problem, and if it is, we all need to contribute to finding a solution so that the health of some of the more vulnerable people is not put at risk because of an inability to travel to hospital to attend appointments.

12.30 pm

The Community Transport Association provides a worthwhile service. It is largely volunteer-led, with 45p a mile — I think that it is to go up to 50p — paid to volunteers to cover some of their basic overhead costs so that they are not out of pocket. They give their time for free, and it is right that they should not be out of pocket. We may need to go on a recruitment campaign in that area. I understand from discussions that more volunteers are needed in some areas so that the people who provide the service do not travel large distances to get to someone to give them a lift to a health centre or somewhere such as that. As a society, we need to look at what we are doing and try to do it better and more efficiently. We must try to ensure that people in our community who are vulnerable are not put at risk because of an inability to travel to some very basic and essential services, particularly, as has been indicated, in the area of health.

Community and rural transport provides a wider service than that. When my son was younger, his youth football team availed itself of a minibus and provided a driver who was suitably trained, so that youth team was able to travel to its matches at a lower cost. That is quite important in a rural community where there could be isolation, and for that matter, it is also important in an urban situation. Physical activity should be encouraged because it is good for mental health and health generally. It is important that all the pieces of the jigsaw come together so that we provide the best service possible and we avoid gaps that may exist in the present service.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. Over the past months, the Committee for Regional

Development has been very vocal on this area, and we will conduct an inquiry into it in the not-too-distant future. It is of benefit, therefore, to have an early indication of the views and opinions of the House, and I will listen to the debate with interest. The Committee has not had the opportunity to discuss the motion or the proposed amendment, but, between them, five members of the Committee for Regional Development have tabled the motion and the amendment. They have expressed their views on a number of occasions, and I will attempt to refer to those during my short address.

There is no doubt that rural communities have particular disadvantages in respect of infrastructure and availability of services and that the frequency and range of travel options is greatly reduced due to the smaller population base and the geographical spread of the population. Therefore, economic viability is at the fore of many decisions on transport in rural areas. However, there is recognition that the people who are most vulnerable in our society, whether they are in an urban or a rural setting, require specific and additional attention. There is an acknowledgement that availability and accessibility of transport options is essential to address exclusion and to provide appropriate access to health services and educational, employment and social opportunities. That was at the core of the previous Programme for Government and is promoted in the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. It is now central to the proposed regional transport strategy that is being consulted on.

For many years, the Department has funded community transport associations and other programmes, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and those have been very successful. The 'CTA Northern Ireland State of the Sector Report 2010' states that CTA has worked with the regional transport fund to provide support to rural transport partnerships and that, across Northern Ireland, some 3,500 groups actively use community transport services such as Dial-a-Lift and Door-2-Door.

However, there is also a recognition in these particularly prudent times that all services supported by the public purse need to be reviewed to ensure that they are operating in the most efficient and effective way. I do not level any criticism at the Department for doing so. The Committee would, however, criticise any attempt by the Department to reduce the extent of those services to our most vulnerable people, rural or urban.

It is appropriate as well to ensure that an integrated approach is taken to ensure that that service is sustained, and I recognise that the proposed amendment seeks to do that. There are, undoubtedly, resources across the likes of health and social services, education and the regional transport and rural development funds that can be exploited and pooled, allowing existing community transport initiatives to be maintained and developed, whilst collectively ensuring that an efficient service with real and positive impacts can be provided for vulnerable communities across Northern Ireland.

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

I will not indicate that the Committee is in support of the motion because, as I stated, we have not discussed the matter.

Mr F McCann: I had to go out to make a call, and I missed a few minutes of the debate, but I have been listening to its tone. I was on the Committee for Regional Development in the last mandate, and there were quite a number of discussions in and around the provision of community transport during that period.

The amendment by the Ulster Unionists deals with a much wider issue in trying to pull all the threads of it together to work out one strategy to deal with community transport. That is probably for the longer term. The motion from my colleagues is specific to hospital appointments and those going to hospitals and is trying to get some immediacy around that whole question. That is the big difference between the amendment and the motion, which is trying to do something now to ensure that people are not falling through the cracks.

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

Mr Spratt: I understand the point that the Member is making but I have already indicated that I am not speaking in support of the motion or the amendment, simply because the Committee has not debated the issue. I recognise the points that he makes, and certainly those points have also been well made on a number of occasions by some of his colleagues on the Committee for Regional Development.

Members will, no doubt, make their views known during the debate. However, I remind the House that the Committee for Regional Development will undertake an inquiry into rural transport sometime in the new year.

Mr Byrne: I, too, support the motion. I very much welcome the fact that the motion has been put out at this time and I congratulate its proposer.

It is fair to say that community transport has been a success story in Northern Ireland over the past 15 years. The rural community transport scheme has very much added to the development of rural development projects and enhanced the development of community initiatives generally in rural areas. In my constituency, places such as Carrickmore, Omagh and Strabane have had, if you like, depots that have facilitated the organisation, management and structuring of rural transport projects that have been very successful. However, there is now a great concern about funding.

An issue that the Department for Regional Development has to address is the SmartPass. In the past, the SmartPass has only been able to be used with travel on Translink facilities. Rural community transport initiatives feel that they need to get a slice of the funding as well to sustain the costs that are associated with running buses.

The rural community transport project that we have in West Tyrone involves about 30 full-time workers between Derry, Strabane and Omagh. There are 40 volunteers. I think that Roy Beggs referred to the amount of volunteer work. If we did not have people working for virtually nothing, that transport infrastructure would not be able to work at all.

There is concern that the health authorities have become dependent on rural community transport providing travel for patients, particularly older people, who have to attend hospital appointments. That poses a resource difficulty for

the organisation that is providing the buses. However, a cutback in the funding for travel to hospital appointments on rural transport buses puts the whole service in jeopardy and means that people who live in isolated areas, particularly older people, are at the mercy of friends and relatives who try to transport them. Surely, as a society, we need to make sure that there is funding allocated for those people.

Lastly, there needs to be co-ordination between DARD, DRD, the health authorities and the Department of Finance and Personnel to try to make sure that we have a streamlined approach. It is not good enough to depend on ongoing piecemeal funding. I urge the Minister to help to co-ordinate sustainable funding for rural transport buses. As I said earlier, the service has been one of the success stories. If it were to be diminished because of a lack of funding, we will all have neglected our rural communities.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr Byrne: Yes, indeed.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree that in any future planning anywhere in the North, community transport should be an integrated element and should not be an add-on, ad hoc facility that does not meet the needs of the people and the various communities that it serves?

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

Mr Byrne: I thank my colleague for that intervention. He is quite right: we need a co-ordinated approach, and there needs to be sustainable funding into the future. This cocktail of funding and the uncertainty surrounding it is not the way forward. Given that there has been such a strong emphasis on developing rural transport projects that are working well, the duty is on government and the authorities to try to make sure that there is sustainable funding into the future.

I appeal for co-ordination and for the Minister to try to make sure that his Department will lead on the issue. I also support what the Chairman of the Committee for Regional Development said about the Committee looking at the issue in the new year. We all recognise the importance of that.

Translink has provided a very good public service but it has not provided a flexible service. Rural transport initiatives provide a flexible service, which has been one of the beauties of the whole system, which has been experienced by many people.

Mr Dickson: I thank the proposers of the motion and the amendment for bringing them to the Chamber. I am happy to support the motion and the amendment.

There is an issue, which is highlighted in the motion, with hospital appointments and how people in rural communities get to their hospital appointments if a community transport service is not available to them or they do not have personal transport. Mr Beggs gave us a very good example of trying to get from his home between Larne and Carrickfergus to Antrim Area Hospital. Even in an urban area such as Greenisland, getting to Antrim Area Hospital using public transport is not the easiest thing in the world.

In a sense, these are mom-and-apple-pie proposals. There is nobody in the Chamber who does not support the concept of quality rural community transport. What we need from the

Assembly, the Executive and our Ministers is an appropriate cross-cutting approach. One reason why I was elected to represent my constituents in the Assembly was to make life better for people.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. I used to be the officer in charge of a rehabilitation centre for older people and I was often exasperated by the fact that school buses and health buses were passing each other on laneways in rural areas and there was no joined-up thinking. That is an example of what the Member is talking about.

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

Mr Dickson: Thank you. I thank the Member for that intervention. I wholeheartedly agree that this is not just a cross-cutting issue about Departments trying to work out how it is best funded and delivered; it is a matter of all those organisations, in the widest possible description of the public sector, that have four wheels on the ground working together to deliver for communities.

That is one reason why I believe I was elected to this Assembly: to try to put forward practical solutions to the problems that we face in our community. I would like to see that being developed and taken further forward.

12.45 pm

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on the matter. I am encouraged by some things that he has said in the past, particularly about this, and I urge him to work with colleagues in other Departments to see, genuinely, what we can do to get some joined-up government for a change.

It would be remiss of us if we did not refer to the excellent work done by voluntary organisations and by individual volunteers, such as good neighbours who take their elderly neighbour, the person with a disability or the person they know to be isolated to their hospital and health centre appointments. However, there are other organisations, including the Red Cross, community groups, churches and many others, working together to deliver on behalf of their neighbours and friends in communities across Northern Ireland.

It beggars belief that in 2011, we cannot get a joined-up community transport strategy for Northern Ireland. As my colleague said, we should be co-ordinating these activities. Our top priority must be to deliver people to hospital for their appointments. If we do not do that, it will push a great deal of cost on to the health service and cause a great deal of stress to the individual who wants to get to their hospital appointment. We know how distressed elderly people in particular can become when they cannot do what they have been asked to do. Some people might suggest that, if you are given an appointment for 10.00 am and you live in the glens of Antrim, it may be best to ring the hospital to tell them that you cannot get there by 10.00 am, but many people want to do what they have been asked to do. It behoves us to try to achieve a better service on behalf of our citizens across Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs referred to social isolation, which is another issue that community transport can and does tackle. It is important that we work together, and, ultimately, it is important that we attempt to rural-proof all policies and decisions made by Ministers and Departments in Northern

Ireland. Community transport is one of the key issues requiring rural-proofing.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. As someone who sits on the Regional Development Committee and who did so in the previous mandate, I am more than aware of the issues affecting community transport schemes and how they work. As has been said, many people involved in community transport are volunteers, and I commend them for the excellent work that they do. The service that they provide can too easily be forgotten. It is good that so many of the Members who have spoken have put on record their thanks.

As someone who lives in a rural area, it is important that I give a bit of an idea of how people who live in such areas are impacted by the fact that they can no longer attend hospital appointments through the community transport scheme. I am glad that the Minister is here, and I hope that he will listen and work with the other Ministers, including the Health Minister and the Finance Minister. In that vein, we support the amendment.

As I said, I live in a rural part of Northern Ireland. We are experiencing difficult weather conditions today but that does not only affect people in rural areas. Many people do not have access to cars. Many people, especially more vulnerable and older people, are isolated in their homes and while their family members are away working, they depend on visits from care workers, who can, on some days, be the only people they see. The importance of rural community transport, certainly in my constituency, is paramount in that it gets people access to local services.

This is an important issue, which could be addressed to allow people to attend their hospital appointments if the funding were provided. Again, I hope that that message does get across. Until last year, Investing for Health provided the funding to allow community transport schemes to take patients to their hospital appointments. On a constituency basis, due to the fact that the Mid-Ulster Hospital and the South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon are now reduced to glorified health centres, it is more difficult for local people to access those services and they have to travel to hospitals that are further away. I suppose that our local hospitals are now Antrim and Craigavon. Unfortunately the service will not allow those patients to be taken via the community transport scheme.

I could change this debate into one about the wrong decision to reduce services in those hospitals but I have no doubt, Principal Deputy Speaker, that you would quickly bring me back to this debate. However, I want to again put on record my opposition to those decisions. The decision on the Mid-Ulster Hospital will certainly be reversed. However, I will stick to the debate that we have.

Other Members have gone into facts and figures. I certainly feel that there are isolated, vulnerable people in our rural communities who need help and access to a service that they have had for quite some time. It has worked very well, and I ask the Minister and his Executive colleagues to do whatever they can to reintroduce funding so that community transport schemes can take people to hospital for medical appointments.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I know that most of the people who have spoken here

today are from rural constituencies. I am from one of the most rural constituencies in the North of Ireland, which is Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Access to hospital appointments is a vital issue, particularly for people who are disabled and the elderly. I commend the Department for funding rural transport and I welcome the Minister here to listen to this important debate. The big problem is that patients travelling for medical care to hospitals outside the county are not funded under the rural transport fund.

Rural communities face specific challenges due to their geographical location, the dispersed nature of the population, less-frequent public transport services and the location of specialised healthcare. In Fermanagh, we are looking forward to the opening of the new hospital, and I hope that it does not end up like a glorified health centre, as the Member opposite said. I hope that there will be greater provision in that new hospital and that fewer people will have to travel to Belfast and Derry. However, the fact will remain that many patients with consultant-led appointments will have to travel to centres of excellence. That is understandable.

I have spoken to people involved in rural transport in my area, and they say that many people who have to travel outside the area cannot be funded by them. However, they do offer advice to members and patients about what options are open for them to travel. They tell them to speak to their GP about a patient transport service and free ambulance service. However, those options are based on medical need. Decisions on who gets access to the transport scheme are arbitrary, and I have been told that GPs do not want the hassle. There are cases of people who do not need the help but get it. On the other hand, there are people who need help but are not offered it.

Local rural transport services provide transport to bus stations and, therefore, access to Translink services. Travelling to Belfast can be fairly straightforward, but older and disabled people are fearful of travelling to Belfast city and then to and from their appointment. Travelling from Fermanagh to Derry involves much more complex travel arrangements. Someone travelling on bus from my area will need to transfer twice — at Omagh and at Derry — both on the journey there and when returning.

Under the social car scheme, which others have mentioned, volunteers use their own cars. Journeys can often cost approximately 60p per mile, and members are advised to seek reimbursement through the hospital travel costs scheme. For someone travelling to and from the Royal from Belleek, the furthest point from Belfast in my constituency, it will cost approximately £150. I have spoken to people who say that claiming financial help and receiving reimbursement is often complex. As with the patient travel scheme, there is often confusion over whether a patient is eligible for help. As a result, people often miss out on the support to which they are entitled and become a missed hospital appointment statistic.

The majority of people who must travel to hospitals outside the county feel that none of the options that I have outlined is viable. The main issue raised at a number of workshops with older people, which were arranged by local providers in Fermanagh, was transport to hospitals outside the county. I ask the Minister, who is a rural representative himself, to protect the community transport scheme, to ensure that

people from rural areas are not disadvantaged in respect of medical visits and hospital appointments. I ask the House to support the amended motion.

Mr G Robinson: I am glad to speak in this debate, as I have worked closely with the providers of community transport in my East Londonderry constituency. I am a past member of the Regional Development Committee, and the topic was often on our agenda.

I appreciate the significance of community transport for the isolated and vulnerable throughout Northern Ireland. Community transport enables disabled, elderly or isolated passengers to have a greater degree of independence and social integration. It is a well-known fact that people who have the benefit of good social integration and a good social life suffer much less from depression and have better health in general. Therefore, community transport could reduce our health spending as a consequence.

Community transport enables people to go into their local towns to do their shopping or attend GP and hospital appointments. That is a major psychological boost for many who live in isolated rural locations. Indeed, community transport can help urban users. That is especially the case for the older population who do not have access to public or family transport options. Community transport is their lifeline. As most Northern Ireland constituencies have rural hinterlands, all MLAs should be aware of the importance of this sector of transport to the rural population's health and well-being.

Money is scarce for every Department, but I hope that the Minister understands that the community transport scheme goes far beyond taking people to a social event and that it has great positive health benefits for the users. Therefore, I ask the Minister to protect a service that is a lifeline for so many people, especially the elderly, vulnerable and isolated. I have suggested previously that the scheme could be expanded, with other Departments perhaps looking at how they can use the infrastructure provided by community transport to their benefit. As budgets are limited, that may be a way of ensuring that there is no duplication of services and that there is value for money in all Departments, with community transport and passengers being key concerns.

Minister, it must be clear by now that I am supportive of the community transport scheme. I sincerely hope that despite all the financial difficulties, you will ensure that community transport is protected and possibly extended. I support the motion and the amendment.

1.00 pm

Mrs D Kelly: On behalf of the SDLP, let me say that we will be supporting the motion and the amendment. We welcome the fact that Sinn Féin recognises that the amendment strengthens the motion and gives recognition to the breadth of service that community transport provides. I congratulate the Members who tabled the motion on securing the debate.

I must declare an interest. I am a founder member of the Loughshore Care Partnership, which uses community transport at least once a week to bring some of our older people who live in very isolated areas of the lough shore to a social club. I am sure that the Minister will recognise that social centres have a preventative health function, in that they often break down social isolation and enable older people to come together at least once a week.

Such clubs have many strengths. They improve mental health and well-being by providing facilities that can be forums for discussion on a wide range of health and safety topics. Fire and Rescue Service officers, social services representatives and the police often come to give advice at those clubs. Therefore, community transport provides a very useful service, and one that is not just about meeting appointments at hospitals.

Members should note that my colleagues have issued a call to action to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education and the Department for Regional Development to look at a cross-cutting measure. As we know, nothing stands still these days, and community transport providers are not asking that a particular or special case be made. They recognise that there are opportunities to provide greater effectiveness and to make more efficient use of resources. There is also an onus on DRD, and on Translink in particular, to recognise that community transport can enhance departmental services and provide some of those services much more economically. Community transport is also more responsive to local need, and even to the needs of individuals.

Therefore, the Executive should look at this as a cross-cutting measure, and it is disappointing that that has not yet happened. Many road users encounter buses from different Executive Departments travelling to and from isolated rural areas, operating without joined-up thinking and in the absence of collaboration on how some of the services might be provided.

Other Members have reflected on the work of volunteers who provide the community transport service. In some of the notes that have been provided for us by the Assembly Research team, it is stated that, from 18 responses to a survey question, over one million trips were made and over 100,000 volunteer hours provided by the organisations involved in community transport. Had all the organisations responded to that element of the survey, it is estimated that over 350,000 volunteer hours might have been the figure provided, and that would represent a more realistic figure.

At a time when many people — in particular, many young people — are out of work or have been unable to get it, volunteering represents a way in which people can not only give something to the local community but develop employability skills and a CV for future employers. Therefore, volunteering not only contributes to the service but is a reciprocal process, whereby the volunteer also gets quite a lot out of it.

Another aspect of community transport that Members mentioned is the uncertainty around funding, as well as the cocktail of funding. That is something that the Minister and others need to look at. Community transport has had to scratch around continually in the soil for funding year on year rather than have an opportunity to develop the service further.

That is not good in any organisation. Many Members will believe that the time of volunteer committees and community transport service managers could be better spent, rather than having to continuously chase after funding. Therefore, we support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am grateful to the Members who tabled the motion and the amendment, which appears to have received widespread support. I was impressed by the tone of the debate and the constructive nature of Members' contributions, and I thank them for that. The debate gives me the opportunity to outline what I have been doing to maintain and enhance rural transport provision.

I am always reluctant to start by pointing out my specific responsibilities as Minister for Regional Development, but, clearly, the motion touches on the needs of rural communities and health services, which are areas in which other Ministers also have clear statutory remits. I fully recognise the need for interdepartmental co-operation, and it is a theme that I will return to. The focus, not only of the Department but of the Executive, must be on the needs of rural communities.

The rural transport fund is administered by my Department and has been in existence since November 1998. Its primary objective is to reduce social exclusion by improving and/or providing transport opportunities in rural areas for people with reduced mobility. The fund offers support through two means of assistance: subsidy for new rural services provided by Translink, which are economically unviable but socially necessary; and revenue and capital funding for rural community transport partnerships that offer a range of complementary services to the public transport network for their members.

Through a partnership between my Department, the general public and community transport sectors, the fund seeks to provide solutions to the transport problems faced by many people living in rural areas. The projects supported by the fund are required to demonstrate that they can fulfil some or all of the following criteria: improve rural people's access to training or employment opportunities; complement the work of other agencies involved in the development of rural communities; support a wide range of community-based activities and have a broad base of community support; and encourage volunteering activity. I join with other Members and pay tribute to the many thousands of people who volunteer their services, and, in many ways, provide essential assistance to their neighbours and friends.

It is important to make the point that the available budget is allocated on the basis of plans submitted by the partnerships. In that sense, it reflects the needs of local communities. It is clear that the criteria are wider than purely hospital visits, and I know that there has been a concentration on health issues, particularly hospital appointments, in this debate. However, many factors impact on individuals' health and well-being, and I was interested in the contribution from the deputy leader of the SDLP, who avails herself of community transport to bring her to bingo. *[Laughter.]*

My Department provides funding through the rural transport fund to eight rural community transport partnerships across Northern Ireland. To ensure that funding is targeted at front line services, we have been encouraging mergers and partnership working to take place between the partnerships. That has been progressing, with stronger organisations emerging in areas such as County Down and County Fermanagh.

I am pleased to say that rural transport funding has been protected in the Budget up to 2014-15. The rural transport fund has an annual budget of £3.75 million for each of the four years of the current spending review. Around one quarter of that goes to Translink to support new or enhanced rural routes, and £2.6 million is paid to the eight rural transport partnerships.

Whilst the budget for the rural transport fund has been protected, there is no scope, in the current financial climate, for year-on-year increases in funding, and the partnerships have to manage the demand for their services and the pressures on their costs as best they can. That is a recurring theme, but it emphasises the need to focus on priority services.

In order to use the rural services, a person must become a member of their local community transport organisation and have difficulty accessing public transport. The extent of the overall bus network provided by Translink is important, but it is also important to remember that the objective of the rural transport fund is not restricted to health activities but that it is locally based. Thus, the Dial-a-Lift scheme can be used for a variety of purposes, including shopping, appointments with local doctors and health centres, local medical appointments, accessing the post office, visiting friends and family and accessing training and employment. Dial-a-Lift cannot be used for hospital inpatient appointments or home-to-school transport. The distinction reflects the long-standing arrangements made by health and education authorities in their respective areas of responsibility and, of course, the statutory and budgetary constraints that I have to work under. As I understand it, the Health Department has a statutory duty to make arrangements for providing or securing the provision of ambulances and other means of transport for the conveyance of persons who are ill, expectant or nursing mothers, or other persons for whom transport is reasonably required. That seems to be a discretionary power, but it applies equally to social services clients.

Current guidance seems to suggest that non-emergency patient transport services should be provided free of charge to those patients with a medical need defined by a doctor. I acknowledge some of the contributions from Members as to how practical that is or whether, in fact, it is practical at all. The guidance does not necessarily mean that those with a clinical need for treatment have a medical need for transport.

It is not appropriate for me to comment on those matters directly, but it is important to put context to the debate. It is important to remember that the focus of the rural transport partnerships and the rural transport fund must be geographically restricted. If, for example, the limited numbers of vehicles available were being used for long journeys outside the area, the majority of members would be disadvantaged. That said, there is clearly a need for practical co-operation on the ground to improve access to services generally. I think that I can point to a number of good developments in that regard. My Department has recently instigated a process to engage with Translink, the community transport sector and officials from the Health Department to explore areas where collaboration makes sense. I refer also to the maximising access in rural areas project (MARA), in which my officials will work with the Public Health Agency, the Agriculture Department and the Social Security Agency to address poverty and social

exclusion in rural areas. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has already committed to increased funding under the heading of rural anti-poverty and social inclusion, and the MARA project will be part-financed under that initiative. The objective of the MARA project is to visit over 10,000 households in 286 rural areas, and it will almost certainly lead to an increase in membership of the rural transport partnerships, which will, hopefully, address isolation and access issues for those most in need.

The assisted rural travel scheme is funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. It provides £400,000 of financial support to allow rural community transport operators to deliver free or discounted travel for holders of a concessionary SmartPass, which was raised by Joe Byrne, among others. The initiative has increased the ability of older people and people in rural areas with disabilities to have equitable use of the SmartPass system.

1.15 pm

Let me firmly reiterate my own and my party's commitment to developing pragmatic and affordable solutions to assist rural communities in accessing transport and my willingness to work with all my Executive colleagues to assist rural communities and the most vulnerable. I note that the amendment refers to the role of the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Clearly, resources remain a constraint. Equally, our willingness to engage across all Departments will be important. I assure Members that I intend to actively monitor and pursue those matters.

With regard to Members' contributions, Mr McMullan highlighted many of the practical problems that his constituents experience, particularly in the glens, and he focused largely on health appointments. However, as I have tried to outline, the system was not exclusively designed for that. There are other opportunities there.

In proposing the amendment, Roy Beggs highlighted the fact that Departments needed to work together and that other schemes, including the travel costs scheme, needed to be highlighted and promoted.

As Chairman of the Regional Development Committee, Mr Spratt made a helpful contribution and confirmed that the Committee is to conduct an inquiry into those matters next year. My Department will, of course, co-operate with that fully, and we look forward with interest to the outcome.

Mr Byrne raised the issue of the SmartPass, and we may correspond with him directly if he wishes to highlight specific cases.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I agree that the system is not exclusively for hospital appointments. However, does he agree that the service to take people to hospital appointments for inpatient services in urban areas has always been there and is currently being operated as a door-to-door service in urban areas?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the Member's point, and I understand the point that he is stressing. I had a brief discussion with the Health Minister this morning, and we are prepared to look together at issues of mutual concern. I hope to have discussions with other Executive colleagues, perhaps the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

and the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to see whether we can make any improvements to the scheme. I remind Members that it is not a health-based scheme, and that remains an important point.

I agree with Mr Dallat's point that the system must meet the needs of local communities. Stewart Dickson referred to it as being motherhood and apple pie to a certain extent. It is an important service, and I know that he understands that. He paid proper tribute to those engaged in voluntary work. Ian McCrea also commended the volunteers, and he wants to encourage Departments to work together. I was not sure about his comment about either Dungannon or Magherafelt being glorified health centres. Important services are provided there.

Mr Lynch highlighted the problems of geography. George Robinson referred to the good social integration that is necessary and can be achieved through rural transport schemes. We have, of course, dealt with Mrs Kelly and her bingo trips.

All in all, I thought that the debate was very good and constructive. I look forward to working with Executive colleagues and, indeed, the Committee for Regional Development and other Members as we carry things forward.

Mr Copeland: In speaking to the amendment, I must say that I have learned three things: first, Members in this Chamber can talk faster than I can write; secondly, you should always have a pen that can outlast the time that Members can speak for; and thirdly, worrying does not really get you anywhere. I know that, because, in his summing up, the Minister referred to most of the things that I wanted to say about other Members' contributions.

This is an important issue, and we need to look at why things have changed and why this service has become necessary. We also need to look at why it needs further support. Things change generally because of changed circumstances. The way that our society used to be structured meant that people could use this scheme for shopping or for personal business. That included access to local health services, local pharmacies, post office or banking services, training and employment, or visiting family and friends. Those are all laudable things that used to be available because of the way that we lived. Somewhere near people's houses was a shop that they could walk to that stocked goods that they needed and that they could buy and get home reasonably easily. The issue now is that everything is centralised, be they medical and health services, shopping, banking, or a whole range of other things. People used to access those services by necessity, and they were accompanied by social interchange and gave people the notion that they were not alone. However, that has gone.

Mr Beggs said that it would take three and a half hours to get from Larne to Antrim Area Hospital for a 10.00 am appointment and three and a half hours back. Presumably, that does not mean a young person or somebody possessed of great physical strength. Rather, it means somebody who is in some way infirm or who needs to get to the hospital but does not have a car and needs someone to take them. In this part of the United Kingdom, that seems an astonishingly long time to spend to access a basic service on which your physical well-being can depend.

Once again, we here have a chance to do something that is not only right but that will necessitate not just one Minister but many making an effort. Money is in silos to some degree, and, as in life, if a Government have sufficient money, they can pretty much do whatever they want. Ian McCrea spoke very well, and he said that he hoped that the message about the funding would get across to the Minister. The Minister looked as though he really hoped that the funding would follow the good wishes that Ian gave him. No one in their right mind would try to prevent the notion that people in need should be facilitated.

This particular service offers value for money and human contact to those of our citizens who are now, in some circumstances, bereft of such contact. It also brings forward the notion that we, as a society, can do things for each other. If local people were to provide a local service for local needs, in my view, it could be done less expensively, more humanely and better.

The issue between the amendment and the motion is, again, a matter of some interest. I did not think that I would stand in this Chamber to state that, on a matter of social importance, Sinn Féin has not gone far enough on this occasion. It limited its delivery largely to the health service, although there were some interesting contributions. I am not sure whether it was a slip of the tongue, but I picked up somewhere on Seán Lynch asking the House to support the motion as amended. I believe that that was possibly a slip of the tongue, but the truth is that I and we believe that, if it were amended, the motion would go further and would give us a chance to seek a solution once and for all.

It will be dependent not only on the Minister for Regional Development but on all the other ministries that have an input or can take funding.

Mr F McCann: I accept and understand that. However, let us look at the history and tradition of this place. Neighbourhood renewal is a classic example. We have been saying that we will get all the Ministers and all the Departments together to work out how to move that matter forward. Earlier, I said in my intervention that the motion is specific to health issues. It is to try to ensure that people do not fall through the cracks. As regards what you are talking about, we could be sitting here in the next mandate still talking about it because there is no push on it. We are being very specific in what we are arguing for in the motion.

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

Mr Copeland: I thank the Member for those comments, which took about 23 seconds of the extra minute that I gained from the intervention.

The truth is that, as the Minister said, the most serious elements in the health service are already a statutory provision for the Health Department. Although we can paper the cracks, as you have referred to the issue, I believe that we should take the opportunity to address it holistically and, once and for all —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time.

Mr Copeland: — settle the notion that we can provide this service more effectively and more properly for the benefit of the people.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. I think that there has been more winding-up done here today, and I do not want to cover anything that has already been wound-up.

I certainly support the motion. I appreciate the nuances between what Michael Copeland and my colleague here said in respect of the motion.

I pay tribute to the Community Transport Association and, indeed, to community transport charities that provide access to healthcare in the rural hinterlands. I pay particular tribute to Billy Moore in the North Coast Community Transport Partnership, which operates in my area, and to Paddy McEldowney for his Easilift scheme. I meet Billy regularly. He has gone from having 30 volunteer drivers initially to somewhere in the region of 4,000. They carry out some 65,000 journeys in a year. That shows the depth and value that community transport charities have in our communities.

My colleague Oliver McMullan related the fact that a three-bus journey was required to get into Belfast from the glens of Antrim. I know of an area, only 15 miles from Derry city, where a four-bus journey is required to access Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Stewart Dickson outlined the dichotomy between the service and the service provision. Cancelling an appointment is often not an option, given that you might have to wait for six or nine months to reschedule. Therefore, that is not an option for many people.

Joe Byrne rightly touched on the proposed co-operation between DARD, the Health Department and the Finance Department. I welcome the fact that the Minister has outlined the fact that an interdepartmental meeting on the issue will, indeed, be proposed. Likewise, I welcome the fact that the Chair of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has announced an inquiry into the provision of the service to rural communities. I look forward to the discussion on that matter in Committee.

The Minister fully recognised the interdepartmental nature of rural transport provision. He outlined the fact that it should complement the work of the other agencies. However, a few short weeks ago in the House, the Health Minister said that his priority was health not transport. If the Health Department invested DARD's rural transport fund, that fund could be extended to provide the community transport operators with the ability to meet the health transport needs of people unable to access conventional public transport. It is really that simple. If only there was a way for Departments to share budgets. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and DRD have a very successful partnership through the assisted rural travel scheme, whereby DARD invests money through DRD to enable rural dwellers to use their SmartPass on dial-a-lift services. Joe Byrne touched on that point.

Minister, more than a brief discussion is perhaps required. This should be looked at sooner rather than later. I welcome the entire debate. It was a bit parochial in places but that is to be expected. I hope that Members will support the motion and the amendment.

1.30 pm

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the dependency that our rural communities have on the community transport scheme for medical visits and access to other local services; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work closely with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that this service is sustained to facilitate the most vulnerable people in our society.

Public Sector Pensions

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

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move

That this Assembly believes that the proposed increases in public sector pension contributions are wrong and unjustified and that they will have a significant adverse impact on many workers; calls on the British Government to respond positively to the trade unions' proposals on pension reform and funding; and further calls on the Executive to review and reverse their decision of September 2011 to impose a 3.2% increase on contributions by members of the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee scheme.

The importance of this issue to public service workers and users of public services manifested itself last week when thousands stood on picket lines and attended rallies across the North. Their message was loud and clear: it is not about self-preservation; it is about fairness and justice. Why should ordinary, hard-working people be penalised for the reckless actions of bankers? Public servants are being unfairly targeted in a bid to solve a financial crisis that was not of their making. Not only is it an attack by the coalition Government on their pockets, which will result in, on average, £63 a month less in take-home pay, it is also an attack on their morale and can only adversely affect the delivery of services that already have to operate in an ever increasingly difficult financial context.

Across the UK, 20% of people have a stake in public sector pension schemes, either living on the pension or currently contributing. Here in Northern Ireland, 28.5% of our workforce is employed in the public sector, which means that the imposition of the reforms will have a disproportionate effect here. That is why it is so important that we, as an Assembly, and our Executive must accept that we have a role and influence in the measures, particularly regarding the pensions of Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) members.

The Executive considered the issue on 22 September. With the exception of my party colleague Alex Attwood, they agreed to adopt the 3.2% increase across the board with no exemptions. I welcome the U-turn by Sinn Féin; it now agrees that NILGOSC members should be excluded. The NILGOSC scheme is self-funded. Unlike other pension schemes, whose contributions go into central Exchequer funds, the NILGOSC scheme contributions are retained by the scheme. Those pensions fall within our control. We should follow the example of Scotland, which has exempted its corresponding schemes from the cuts. We must stand up as a devolved Government and show that we are not here to just rubber-stamp Tory policy. We must aspire to our own economic policies and focus on stimulating the economy and creating jobs. Taking money out of people's pockets will do little to do that.

We fear that increased contribution demands will lead to more people opting out of schemes, which will ultimately cost the Government's social security budget later. I recognise that amendment No 1 calls for continued, and, I hope, intensified, negotiations between the Government and trade unions. We support that. However, the fact is that, while negotiations have been ongoing, the coalition Government have jumped the gun and enforced changes — changes that are already impacting on many people who are a million miles away from receiving the gold-plated pension schemes that some parties and sections of the media would happily have the public believe all public sector workers get as a right.

I spoke to people on picket lines at Altnagelvin Hospital, Derry City Council offices, Translink offices and a few other places in my constituency last week and to employees in this very Building today. Those workers are as susceptible as anyone else to tax increases, inflation, the rising cost of living and the draconian measures of welfare reform that are coming fast. We have a moral responsibility to protect them. Pay freezes, recruitment moratoriums and, now, an attack on their pensions — it is no wonder our public sector workers are taking to the streets.

In real terms, the change to the inflation measure for payment of public service pensions from the retail price index (RPI) to the consumer price index (CPI) will cut the value of a public service pension by around 15% over the period of someone's retirement. There are also implications for workers in certain professions having to work longer, and I am thinking of firefighters and paramedics, among others.

I appeal to Members to support the motion today. We must not fall victim to the divide-and-rule approach of the Tory-led coalition Government. They are happy to demonise unions and have private sector workers turn on public sector workers, and vice versa, in a blame game with no winner, and they would be happy to see us do the same today.

I see merit in both amendments. However, I will find it very difficult to support amendment No 1, because it virtually emasculates the motion, although I have already agreed on the need for further negotiation. Amendment No 2, tabled by Sinn Féin, calls for the exemption of NILGOSC members and of workers earning under £32,000, but it does not go quite far enough. Many people earning over that amount are the sole breadwinners in their house, and we would be loath to see them have to carry an even heavier burden in any inequitable new scheme. The motion aspires to oppose any increases in public service worker contributions, and we feel that our accepting amendment No 2 might be seen as an acceptance of such increases and cause division in the sector when, now more than ever, unity is required. We do, however, note that the suggestion could be explored further.

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

"recognises the fundamental changes to public sector pension provision across the United Kingdom; expresses disappointment that a resolution could not be found and that strike action was deemed necessary by trade unions; and calls on the trade unions and the UK Government to continue negotiations with a view to finding a solution and preventing further strike action in the future on this matter."

I support the amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party. At the outset, I confirm that my party and I are fully aware of the importance of pensions. Indeed, in another life, I was a trustee of a national pension scheme, so I am well aware of the benefits of final salary pension schemes. I recognise that many people pay a significant amount of money into a pension pot to enable them to enjoy their retirement and to maintain a good standard of living as they get older. We all aspire to that. Indeed, many will recognise the truism that pensions are really deferred pay. We are indebted to many public sector workers — doctors, nurses, teachers and civil servants — who all contribute to Northern Ireland as a whole and who are fundamental to the health service, the education system and other Departments.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the fundamental changes that are being proposed to public sector pension provision across the whole of the United Kingdom. The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) has stated that for someone on a salary of £15,000, the proposals would result in the payment of an extra £37.50 in contributions a month. For someone on £40,000, that equates to an extra £100 a month. I understand that that is not inconsiderable or insignificant, especially during a time of austerity. However, the Treasury has made it clear that those who are 10 years or less from retirement on 12 April 2012 are assured that there will be no detriment to their retirement income, which is an issue that has not come out very clearly in the press.

As Mr Durkan outlined, the pension proposals have been brought forward following extensive research by the coalition Government. Lord Hutton led the independent commission, which produced its final report in March 2010. Its findings were clear. First, people are living longer, which means that the number of pensioners will continue to increase. Secondly, there is an imbalance between employee and taxpayer contributions; it is, therefore, only right that public sector workers are on an even playing field. Thirdly, the final salary scheme is unfairly biased towards higher earners.

Those are not the views of the Ulster Unionist Party; they are the findings of Lord Hutton, a former Labour Minister, and they were echoed by Danny Alexander, the Liberal Democrat Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and by George Osborne, the Conservative Chancellor. Those views represent all shades of Government. Therefore, it seems that there is broad consensus among political parties in Westminster that public sector pension reform needs to occur.

Of course, the current economic climate also needs to be taken into consideration. We are all familiar with the effect that the downturn has had on our near neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, countries such as Greece and Portugal, and, indeed, the euro zone in general. All of them are struggling. Public sector pension reform must be considered in that context.

On many occasions during the past few weeks, the Ulster Unionist Party has reiterated that it supports anyone's right to strike. However, my party's amendment underlines our disappointment that the dispute reached that stage. We would, of course, have liked to see a resolution that would have rendered such action unnecessary. Negotiations between trade unions and the UK Government did not bring about a positive outcome; that is why we are urging that

those negotiations continue to find a solution. That can be the only sensible way forward.

It is of the utmost importance that we avoid a repetition of Wednesday 30 November 2011. It is any worker's right to partake in strike action. However, the cost to the economy was millions of pounds, with some estimates as high as £500 million. We cannot afford industrial action; therefore, we must find an equitable solution for all parties involved. For that reason, I support my party's amendment.

Mr McLaughlin: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after "Executive" and insert:

"to respond to this imposition in a manner which excludes members of the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee scheme; notes the proposal by the Minister of Education to exclude all other public sector workers who earn less than £32,000 per year; and calls on all Ministers to explore similar options."

I speak in favour of amendment No 2, which has been tabled by my party, and to oppose amendment No1, which has been offered by the Unionist Party. My party's view could be characterised as disappointed but not surprised by the Unionist Party's amendment, given that that party campaigned for the Tories during the recent general election. The Assembly should not be particularly shocked that the Unionist Party now supports and slavishly accepts the outworking of Tory policies.

My party was drawn to the argument that some public sector workers who are members of the NILGOSC scheme, as opposed to the general scheme, would be asked to pay twice. It was reasonable to consider the impact of that. We have made it explicit in our amendment that we support the exclusion of NILGOSC workers. That will benefit some 44,000 people, or 20%, of a public sector workforce of 220,000. My party is also concerned about the remaining 80%, many of whom are in the lower-paid category. The proposed 3.2% across-the-board pension levy would impact significantly on those people.

We ask the SDLP to consider our amendment. It was not clear in Mark H Durkan's opening remarks whether his party was prepared to offer any solace to those public sector workers who would benefit from exactly the same concerns that are reflected in the SDLP's position on NILGOSC. We ask the party to extend that to the wider public sector. Based on some economic modelling that was done in the Department of Education, the second largest spending Department, Sinn Féin suggests that we use our powers, limited though they are, to take an approach that was invited by the cavalier response from Westminster. That response was that we had to impose the levy or they would simply deduct the £140 million each year for a three year period and get their money anyway. In doing so, they offered clear evidence that parity, as an argument, did not apply, and that they were determined to get their pound of flesh.

1.45 pm

We are proposing a much more equitable approach for the less well paid members of the public sector. We are offering that protection, and we are doing it on the basis that we are satisfied with the economic modelling. If that modelling can be done in one Department, especially one of

the larger Departments, it can be applied across all of the Departments.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. One of the concerns that the SDLP has with the Sinn Féin amendment relates to those workers who earn more than £32,000 a year. Sinn Féin has not provided the information on how much more those workers would be likely to pay, and they could end up paying 7% or 8% to make up for those who earn less. Without that detail, we find it hard to support the amendment.

Mr McLaughlin: I resist the temptation to say this, but you could research the issue, and perhaps it should be considered. Focusing on a scheme that benefits 20% of the public sector does not meet the challenge or the reasons why so many public sector workers went on strike last week. We must demonstrate a commitment to protect front line services, which means protecting, to the extent that we can, our block grant settlement. We must also find a scheme through which the better paid — some public sector workers are very well paid — could support the levy that is being applied to the public sector pension scheme.

Our argument is that we should keep as many options open as possible, and our amendment invites other Ministers to do what the Minister of Education has done. He went to his Department and asked his officials to run some financial modelling on how this could be applied, and that is where the figure of £32,000 came from. We sought to establish a threshold that people would regard as reasonable in protecting the less well paid and the budget for our front line services. We also sought to acknowledge that those who are in the middle or higher levels of the public sector are capable of paying the levy and the recalculated levy through which the Westminster Government is clawing back their money.

That is the basis of our proposition. I hope that the party opposite, the DUP, which, in the past, has taken a similar line to us in these matters, will distance itself from simply accepting Tory policy and applying it, which is what the Unionist Party amendment invites us to do. That party is asking us to wash our hands of the problem, to say that it is not our problem, that we have no say in it and that we should simply apply it and blame Westminster. We can do more than that, we can do better than that, and our amendment identifies how we can do that. We must set a threshold. Let the other Ministers check with their Departments, do the modelling and come back to the Executive and inform the debate. That is the basis of our amendment.

Mr Hamilton: I support the amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party. I think that it is a solid, sound and sensible amendment. They are labels —

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Do not go overboard.

Mr Hamilton: I have been encouraged not to go overboard, and I assure the Minister that I only said that for effect. Those are labels that I could not apply to the motion tabled by the SDLP or to the amendment tabled by Sinn Féin.

The DUP will not, during this debate or at any time, demonise anyone who was on strike last week or who chooses to take action. Although there was inherent protection for the low paid in the Executive's decision

of 22 September, that followed the decisions that were taken at Westminster and a proposal to taper and phase in the increases, we understand that there will be some who will be negatively affected and who will receive a pay cut as a result of the changes proposed by Her Majesty's Government. We have some sympathy for those individuals. We think that it was wrong, though, mid-negotiation, while an improved offer was put on the table, to go out on strike. I question the merit of having the strike. The only damage that it appeared to do was to those people who would have availed themselves of public services last week. Indeed, having spoken to many people in the private sector last week, as I do most weeks, I know that there is bafflement at what is being done in the public sector among people who have endured not just wage freezes but wage cuts and who would look enviously at the pensions being offered to many in the public sector.

I want to make another observation. The SDLP motion says that the proposed increases in public sector pensions are wrong and unjustified. If we were facing a scenario in which public sector pensions were being increased, we would not be debating that issue, nor would there be any public sector strikes. The Members opposite mean the proposed increases in contributions as opposed to increases in public sector pensions. I wonder how the public purse would afford that. It raises questions about the argument being put forward by the SDLP, but it is a stupidity that one comes to expect from that party, and I am concerned that it is being aped by Sinn Féin as well.

The basic point that we are putting forward is that you cannot play reckless games of Russian roulette with the principle of parity in relation to public sector pensions. You would not want to do it with social security either. It is a reckless, dangerous game to play, and the consequence of not following it, which is what is being encouraged by some in this House, is that ultimately, by 2015, the Northern Ireland block grant will be hit by £140 million a year repeating. Each and every year we would have that amount taken out of our block grant.

I agree with the Education Minister, who said that having to deal with that level of cuts on top of everything else that we have had to deal with could only affect front line education services as well as health services, local government, housing, and so forth. Those are the consequences of breaching parity. Even union leaders in Northern Ireland know that, in the long term, maintaining parity is to the benefit of public sector workers here.

The SDLP talks about Scotland as if it were a paragon of virtue on this issue. After a lot of huffing and puffing, the Scottish Government left it to scheme managers in local government to take the decisions that they do not have the courage to take. They also want to create, as endorsed by Sinn Féin, two tiers of public sector workers — those who pay increased contributions and those who do not. Why, instead of having pay parity, would you want to have that breach? Why would you want to have different sets of public sector workers in Northern Ireland?

The NILGOSC scheme is different — it is a funded scheme — but there is still a substantial deficit of around £800 million, which has nearly doubled in the past three years. That has, somehow, to be covered in the longer term, and it will have to be done through employer contributions if the

Members opposite have their way. Although it does not have an effect on the block grant, as they rightly say, it has an effect on the amount of money that can be provided for front line services in housing, local government, education and transport in Northern Ireland. There is an impact on public sector spending in Northern Ireland as a result.

The Sinn Féin proposal sets an arbitrary cap at £32,000. As Pat Ramsey observed, the consequence of that would be great if it resulted in an increase of only 7% or 8%. That would be modest. In the Civil Service scheme alone, 16% of workers would then have to pay what the other 84% are not paying. That would have a devastating impact on those who would have to pay it. This is absolute madness. The Executive have taken a decision, which is binding on all Ministers, those from Sinn Féin and the SDLP included. We play fast and loose with pension parity at our peril.

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

Mr Hamilton: What we have before us is nothing but posturing and playing political games for the benefit of people outside, when they should be thinking about what is in the best interests of everybody in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. Although I appreciate that Members have a range of opinions on the matter, and that consensus may be an unrealistic objective, I believe that a number of valid points have been raised that we need to consider.

Coming on the back of last week's public sector strikes, which were well evidenced across Northern Ireland as well as on our front lawn, it is a particularly sensitive and relevant issue, as the consequences of any decisions made will have an impact on those whom we know and work with regularly. The public sector represents a huge percentage of the labour market in our society, and the level of performance and dedication offered in its service to our public should never be overlooked or undermined. Members will know that, in the past, when pitted against the private sector, the public sector was viewed as below par on salary scales, but because of that disparity, certain benefits were afforded to public sector workers in recognition of their service, including significant maternity and sickness arrangements, enhanced financial insurance schemes that were unavailable elsewhere and superior pension provisions.

In recent years, we have seen a role reversal between the public and private sectors, and a rise in public sector salaries has helped to redress the traditional economic balance between the two. As a result, the public sector is now generally better paid and pensioned as well as boasting a faster increase in the rate of pay, and a salary gap has subsequently emerged between the two sectors in the opposite direction. However, greater alignment is still achievable and necessary, and government proposals for reform seek to take into account the sustained ambiguities between the public and private sectors.

We cannot escape the fact that we have an ageing population. Employees in the private and public sector are working longer, which translates into an increased financial commitment bearing down on the public purse. We need to address that not only because it is unfair but because it serves as a barrier to rebalancing our economy from an over-reliance on the public sector. Reform of the current system is now necessary, given the growing cost to the taxpayer.

Public service pensions have increased by one third in the past 10 years to £32 billion, and the Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that, without reform, spending on pensions will rise by £7 billion over the next five years. In 1970, pension costs accounted for just 1% of GDP, yet today they stand closer to 2%, which is more than what is spent in total on courts, prison and police services.

Under the proposals set out by Westminster, individual pension contributions from public sector workers would increase by 3.2 percentage points with a staggered phasing-in period to be implemented between 2012 and 2014. As a counterweight against those increases, lower-paid public sector workers who earn less than £15,000 would face no increase, and those who earn less than £18,000 would have their contributions capped at 1.5%. The implications of the proposed changes were well summarised by Francis Maude MP with his analysis that the new measures, including a shift away from final salary schemes to a scheme based on average income, would leave the poorest paid public sector workers better off in the long term. Even taking into account any increase in personal contributions, these remain first-rate pensions that are markedly superior to those available in the private sector. In line with the reform, commitments have also been given to retain a form of defined benefit pension and protection of accrued rights to ensure that those within 10 years of retirement would neither have to work longer nor see their pension income reduced.

As a party, we have been consistent on our position on public sector pension regulation, as evidenced in Westminster where our East Belfast MP Naomi Long voted against RPI and CPI uprating changes. Although we support the Ulster Unionist Party amendment, it is probably worth highlighting the fact that, had that party succeeded in having any candidates elected to Westminster in the last mandate, it would have voted with the Government on this matter and not against it as we did.

The overarching objective of the reforms must be viewed in perspective, and although we realise that such changes are unfortunate, they are necessary. Those affected both directly and indirectly have just cause to be frustrated, but, arguably, the true source of their anger should be the free rein that is still afforded to the wealthiest in our society, who are scattered throughout boardrooms across the UK. Those industry elites face no genuine pressure from the Government to show restraint either in salary or bonus payments despite the persistent pressure placed on public sector pay and pensions and the mounting scrutiny of ordinary private sector workers' salaries.

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

Mrs Cochrane: Yes, OK. Thank you.

Mr Girvan: I am in favour of the Ulster Unionist Party amendment, and I feel that there is some merit in its approach. Unfortunately, the unions did not necessarily engage properly with the Government and went down the route of not only costing the country money but doing the same to their members, who have lost pay because of the strike. However, the whole community is suffering greatest, and it lost a lot of services on the day of the strike.

I am not saying that the people who took the opportunity to go out on strike were wrong. There is merit in voicing

their opposition to what is being imposed on them by the Westminster Government.

2.00 pm

The issue of parity has been mentioned already this afternoon, and we agree with sticking with parity. This country would lose out in the area of benefits if we were not to do so. Mention has also been made of the £4.6 million that non-implementation of the scheme by April 2012 will cost the Northern Ireland Executive. That will add up to £140 million by 2014, and that money will be removed from direct front line delivery.

The SDLP's proposal focuses on the local government aspect, the NILGOSC scheme. That is only one part of public sector employment. There are six schemes in place, and we have to look at it as a whole. All of those schemes have some burden to bear.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. Is the Member as surprised as I am that, potentially, the reason for the SDLP's motion sticking to the NILGOSC scheme is that its party's Minister presides over the relevant Department?

Mr Girvan: Thank you for that intervention. That is exactly the point that I was about to come to. The SDLP is somewhat looking after its own house in the Department for which it has some responsibility.

The fact that we are here today discussing the pension scheme is not just to do with Northern Ireland. There is a world recession, and we have major shortfalls. It is not just the British Government that are suffering but the world's economies. As such, we all have a collective responsibility to try to address some of those measures.

Ms Ritchie: Will the Member accept that the NILGOSC scheme does not deal solely with local government but with people who are in the Fire and Rescue Service and people who are in other branches of that sort of activity? Therefore, the NILGOSC scheme is not solely the responsibility of the Minister of the Environment. In view of that, I ask the Member to correct his position.

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

Mr Girvan: That makes it even worse. I do not wish to go back into much detail on that.

The Sinn Féin amendment proposes to cap it at £32,000 and have no increase. As other Members have said, that represents almost 84% of public sector employees. The remaining 16% of public sector employees would have to make up the shortfall, and that would be horrendous on a small number. Sinn Féin is the party that talks to us about dealing with everything on the basis of equality. The fairer way forward is to ensure that those who are definitely at the lower end, earning £15,000 and below, pay nothing additional and that those who earn less than £20,000 have a small increase.

The pension burden on our GDP was mentioned. People are living longer, and that is to be welcomed, but it also adds to the burden. For those people who are employed in the public sector, what is coming in through that money is what is paid out in the pension schemes. Unfortunately, with our shrinking public sector, we will be looking at an

ever-increasing deficit. Therefore, it is important that we keep parity with the rest of the United Kingdom so that the Executive are not left carrying the can. That is the way forward. I support the Ulster Unionist Party amendment.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is unfortunate that we are having this debate, and we are doing so because there has been an attack on pension schemes. Some reports say quite clearly that there was a robbery on the pension scheme where people paid in all their lives for a pension — *[Interruption.]*

Sorry? If people want to raise a point of order or ask me something, I will sit down, but they should not make snide remarks.

The point is that there was a robbery. Public sector workers have been putting their money into pension schemes all their lives, and yet they are being asked to work longer and pay more money because the money is not there to meet their needs when they come to retirement age.

Just to clarify, NILGOSC includes Fire and Rescue Service workers and, I think, employees of the education and library boards and some health trusts. So it is a wider range of individuals rather than just those in areas under the Department of the Environment.

In west Belfast last Wednesday, I went round many of the picket lines with party colleagues, speaking to many of the people who thought that it was necessary and in their best interests to take some sort of action to put a halt to that. Instead of some of us walking through the picket lines, some of us stood on the picket lines and engaged with people and talked to them about the issues they are facing now and will face in the future.

Many I spoke to were very low paid workers. Many earn under £32,000. Our amendment is to try to protect people who earn £32,000 or less. I genuinely ask the SDLP to read our amendment again. We are calling on all Ministers to explore that and similar options. I do not know how the SDLP cannot support that, because it is about exploring and getting the facts and figures correct before we move the issue on. So I ask the SDLP again to reconsider their stance on that amendment.

I listened to Leslie Cree, and no doubt we will hear from other members of the Ulster Unionist Party. We saw people such as David Cameron standing beside the Ulster Unionist Party just prior to the Westminster election last year. The Ulster Unionist Party in this day and age obviously still supports the Conservative Party. The fact of the matter, however, is that its amendment is endorsing near enough what the Conservatives are trying to do here, namely, to railroad people into having to pay the maximum amount.

The British Government allowed the robbery on the pension schemes, and it is a shame that people are supporting that. The motion and the UUP's amendment allow them a free way out of that and provide a bit of wriggle room. It is unfortunate that the DUP has now jumped on to that bandwagon and seems to be supporting Tory policy when it comes to some of the cuts in some services, especially to the pension schemes here in the North.

As I said, however, I met and talked to people who earn very little money, and a lot of them come from where I live

and the area I represent. It is about protecting the most vulnerable. If we can do nothing else, we need to do that: protect the most vulnerable. That is a big issue and a big challenge for us all. That will not be an easy issue for any of us to tackle, but people are being victimised. Low-paid workers will be roped into that scheme to pay an extra 3·2% into their pension schemes. They will not be retiring with any better pension. In fact, they will be worse off. If anything, we can send out the message today: let us protect the lowest paid workers.

Mr Weir: Obviously, there is a lot of sensitivity about this motion and this issue. We need to be mindful that a lot of workers are very concerned about the state of their pensions. There is a very genuine issue, and I can understand people being concerned.

However, it does not help if there is a degree of cant and hypocrisy. I note, for example, the previous Member accusing us of, in some way, jumping onto some Tory bandwagon. That seems quite strange, given that his own party voted for exactly the same proposals only a few weeks ago at the Executive. I do not know whether there has been some form of Damascus conversion, or whether Saul Maskey has become Paul Maskey. I do not know. However, it does seem that there has been a degree of conversion on the other side.

Let us be honest: there is a very serious issue here. In trying to find a solution to the pensions issue, we have to realise that if you shift the burden from one group of workers, you are simply placing it elsewhere. We are in a very different situation to the one we were in many years ago.

As has been indicated, the ageing population has an impact. We cannot simply close our eyes and pretend that this is not happening. People are living longer. I do not need to say that in this Chamber, because sometimes when you are sitting in this Chamber it feels like you are living an awful lot longer. The actuarial statistics show that life expectancy is going up. That is not going to change. As years move on, that will become a greater burden. We need to ensure that the pensions system is fair and equitable.

Are we in the exact position where people should be signing off? I do not think that we are. To be fair to the Ulster Unionist amendment, it points to the need for further talks between the Government and the unions across the UK to try to reach an equitable solution. Let us remember that the cases for welfare reform and pension reform are inescapable.

This is largely based on the Hutton report. John Hutton, to be fair to him, is not a prototype Conservative; he has not even been a member of the Ulster Unionist Party at any stage. He is actually a former Labour Cabinet Minister. *[Interruption.]* I will be happy to give way.

We all have sins in our past that we have to confess to, but, to be fair to John Hutton, he is not someone who can confess to membership of either the Ulster Unionist Party or the Conservative Party. Anybody looking at this from a dispassionate point of view will see that there is a need for pension reform. There is a need for change, and there is no getting away from that. We would all like to see a solution emerge that has a national buy-in, and there is clearly more work to be done. As John Hutton said at the weekend, the general direction of travel that the reform needs to go in

and its broad bones have been set. That is something that, ultimately, will have to be embraced.

One of the problems that I have with both amendments is that they disaggregate different forms of workers. It has been rightly pointed out that the NILGOSC proposals go beyond local government to a range of other workers: they take a chunk of workers in the public sector and put them in a completely different place to the rest of the workers. As Paul Girvan said, that, if anything, makes it worse.

Similarly, Sinn Féin's proposals are at least monetarily based. However, I am surprised at the figure of £32,000 being picked. As I am sure that the Sinn Féin Members can testify, that is considerably above the average industrial wage. I am sure they know that from their own pay packets that come home each week. Again, that is simply an exercise in shifting the burden.

Either amendment would cost the block grant a large amount of money or, alternatively, cost other civil servants money. Pitting one group of public servants against another is shifting the burden. In the Sinn Féin amendment, some people at the upper end can opt out of the system, which simply places a much greater burden on a smaller number of people.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Mitchel McLaughlin said that Westminster was quite happy to concede that there does not need to be parity on this. That should be a warning bell to all of us. Let us remember that in his statement last week, George Osborne raised the issue of regional pay settlements for public sector workers. The Government seem quite keen to break parity. That is a grave danger, and if we start breaking parity on pensions or wages, the people who will suffer in the long term will be public sector workers in Northern Ireland. So, the routes proposed by the SDLP and Sinn Féin are very foolish.

Mr McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: Unfortunately, my time is up.

We need to stick with parity. We need to see a national agreement on this. Therefore, I support the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment.

Mr Nesbitt: I feel that I should begin by declaring an interest, because I am in receipt of a pension that is largely funded by the taxpayer. That comes after many years of working in the private sector where my attitude was much more of a hokey-cokey: in when I could afford it, but more often out.

A few years ago when I joined the Victims' Commission, I was briefed on the pension that I would receive as a commissioner. I found the employer contribution to be quite eye-watering. I accept that that was at the high end and that not all public sector pensions are particularly fulsome. However, I think that the point needs to be made that all 108 MLAs are in receipt of such pensions, unless Sinn Féin Members, who take the industrial wage rather than the full salary, want to correct me. I do not know whether your contribution from your employer — the taxpayer — is to the value of the industrial wage or of the full £43,000. Perhaps we can clarify that as we go along.

2.15 pm

Mr Weir: Perhaps there is a Sinn Féin retirement home for former MLAs and workers; maybe that is where a section of that money is going.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I was asking a serious question around clarification. I am simply not sure whether it is based on the industrial wage or on the full £43,000.

I support amendment No 1, not the proposed motion, and in order to explain why, I will go through it line by line. It begins by stating:

"this Assembly believes that the proposed increases in public sector pension contributions are wrong and unjustified".

Like Mr Hamilton, I will focus on the phrase "wrong and unjustified". I could have lived with the increases being described as "regrettable"; "as small as possible"; or that they should have been "an action of last resort". Indeed, I believe all three things are the case. However, to call them "wrong and unjustified" flies in the face of the reality of, for example, an Taoiseach's speech to the people of the Republic of Ireland last night, which warned of the economic times ahead. Perhaps Mr Maskey feels that the speech was written for him by David Cameron, but I think that it might have been his own work. That phrase denies the reality of more emergency talks today between France and Germany on the problem of debt, and in the word "debt" we have the clue. We are all in debt, and we cannot go on as we are.

Many retired people look to enjoying themselves in a variety of ways; one great source of enjoyment for many is their families, particularly their grandchildren. Today, there will be a newborn or two coming out of our maternity wards. Each will have a little red book that they are given by the Health Service to monitor their health, but as well as having that in one hand, metaphorically speaking, in the other there will be an invisible invoice that will represent their share of today's £120 million that the Government must spend on servicing debt rather than funding services.

The reason why pension contributions have to go up is because of our debt. Currently, the United Kingdom makes £48.6 billion in debt interest payments annually. To put that in context, it would fund 1.5 million nurses; 1.2 million teachers; 1.1 million police officers; or 399,000 general practitioners. It is a question of debt and affordability and, although that is a matter for regret, it does not make what is happening wrong or unjustified.

Secondly, the motion:

"calls on the British Government to respond positively to the trade unions' proposals".

That tries to impose a prejudged outcome. I would rather call on both sides to enter positively into further negotiations in the attempt to find a reasonable solution. I am not sure what benefit anyone got from the strike last week, but I imagine that it at least gave many on the picket line the opportunity to vent their anger and frustration.

On a personal basis, I would like to compliment those on the picket line at Massey Avenue, who, as I entered the building last week, were extremely polite when handing over their little information leaflet explaining —

Mr Wilson: There was a better class of pickets on Massey Avenue.

Mr Nesbitt: That may well be, Mr Wilson. They very politely accepted the leaflet that I gave to them explaining why I felt I had to cross the picket line.

Finally, the motion calls on the Executive to reverse their decision to impose an increase of 3.2% on contributions by members of NILGOSC. It seems to me that the Assembly and Executive have no more spare cash than the Government at Westminster. It is not necessarily a proposal that I believe is grounded in the real world.

The Executive are struggling for money, Westminster is struggling for money and Europe is struggling for money. We are in a global recession, and it seems to me that if there were the sort of money available to fund what the SDLP proposes — or Sinn Féin in amendment No 2 — we could do what Mr Maskey was calling for, which is to target it. I suggest that we would do better by targeting those in fuel poverty and particularly the most vulnerable. They are the people most likely to die over the course of another cold winter. I support amendment No 1.

Dr McDonnell: I want to say at the outset that the SDLP is committed to opposing the proposed changes to pension contributions. We argue that the best approach is to support the union proposals, made in their recent negotiations, as a proper way through the issue. Indeed, our Minister Alex Atwood was the only Minister to vote against the proposals when they came before the Executive recently.

There is a lot of confusion around some of the amendments, particularly the Sinn Féin amendment. It is right in principle, but it is a bit muddled in detail. In reference to Mr McLaughlin's comments earlier, I think that it would be appropriate if Sinn Féin had done some meaningful research into financial modelling for that amendment, because, from where I am standing, it is hard to see it as anything other than a smoke cloud to confuse the position that Sinn Féin has already taken at Executive level. Mr Hamilton seemed to have a difficulty in reading the motion, so I want to point out that the motion states quite clearly that it is about pension contributions. I refer him back to the detail of the motion.

Public servants did not create the financial crisis, yet, to all intents and purposes, they seem to be unfairly targeted in solving the financial crisis. The proposed 3.2% rise in pension contributions means an average of something like £63 per month is taken out of their take-home pay. Whatever way that target is achieved and whatever variable there is, it will come back on the pension members. The Westminster Government have been negotiating with unions about changes to the pension schemes, and, to my mind, the unions have been co-operative, yet the Government have jumped the gun and forced those changes.

There are other options that the Government could have considered, including a tax on bank transactions. Earlier, we put forward various ways and means — some 57 options or costed money-raising ideas — to fill the £4 billion funding

gap in our document 'Partnership and Economic Recovery'. We regret that that was substantially ignored.

I want to turn briefly to the NILGOSC scheme. That scheme is self-funded. It should have no relevance. Unlike other pension schemes, where contributions go into the central Exchequer, the NILGOSC scheme contributions are retained by the scheme itself and invested. It is a fully funded scheme, and, in my mind and the mind of many others, there is no need for it to —

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that many in the private sector — some 66% — do not have any pension scheme, and that their rates, like everyone else's, have been continually increased to fund that scheme?

Mr Speaker: Dr McDonnell, you have a minute added on to your time.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I fully accept that, and I fully accept that there is a case for a comparison between the private sector and public sector, but that is not the issue here. The issue here is that pension schemes are being loaded to sort out the financial crisis that we are in. I happen to feel that it is unfair that those things should be unilaterally loaded.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: Sorry, I have given way once.

The NILGOSC scheme is fully funded. I understand that, even in the present situation, when they have their investments made, it is 85% covered, even in this difficult financial time. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue. It is quite obvious that the Member has no intention of giving way.

Dr McDonnell: We cannot have a granny state all the time. The NILGOSC scheme is quite capable of funding itself. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Beggs: Its deficit has doubled in three years.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr McDonnell: If I could respond to that silly remark: it is entitled. It is a private scheme that is run outside the state service, and, therefore, it is entitled. Equities are very far down at the moment. Equities will rise, and it will be in surplus. What do you expect them to do when it is in surplus? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Dr McDonnell: The Westminster Government recognise that the scheme is different. It is not being considered as part of the central scheme under the union and government negotiations. A separate employee/employer negotiation is taking place on the equivalent of the NILGOSC scheme in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland, employers, employees and NILGOSC believe that an agreed way to revise pension provision can be found without the increase in employee contributions. It could be done in a phased and sensible way. The issue is pension reform, and it has to be done sensibly.

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

Dr McDonnell: It cannot be done in blanket format across all the schemes.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time when the next Member to speak will be Steven Agnew.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

DEL: EU Engagement

1. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he plans to lead a programme of engagement between his Department and the European Union in the next six months. (AQO 898/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

Yes. It is clearly important for my Department to maximise the benefits of EU engagement, and I am fully committed to that objective. I want to continue to make the most of the platform offered by the Barroso task force. My Department has already taken the lead on the thematic working group for competitiveness and employment, as well as being an active participant in the working groups for innovation and technology and social cohesion. A wide range of engagement activities is planned; for example, my Department is currently a partner in an application for funds under a progress programme entitled 'Regional Partnerships: activating untapped talent to deliver new skills for new jobs' and as the lead partner for the EU Empowerment and Inclusion Learning Network.

Through the office of the Executive in Brussels, we are engaged with the regional skills education and training network to identify partners for future projects in support of themes in the Northern Ireland skills strategy. The employment service, through the European employment services office, EURES, will be taking part in the European Jobs Fair in 2012. I have established an annual fund of £80,000 to encourage increased participation by the universities in the European framework 7 programme.

To assist my Department and others in our engagement with the European Union, the Executive are currently recruiting four new desk officers for the Executive's office in Brussels in order to improve contacts with EU officials and to help Departments pursue potential funding opportunities. To advance our role in the EU further, I intend to undertake a visit to Brussels within the next few months.

Mr Speaker: Questions 3 and 8 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his detailed response. How successful have Queen's University and the University of Ulster been in attracting research and development funding through the European framework 7 programme?

Dr Farry: It is an area in which we are always looking for continual improvement. Our recent targets in relation to drawdown across the Executive have been met, but we must continue to push ourselves further. It is one of those areas that has been identified where a lot more money could potentially be drawn down.

I am very keen to encourage co-operation between our universities and other research partners. We need to encourage a much more flexible system. At times, the bureaucracy around the framework 7 programme has curtailed some of the opportunities, perhaps needlessly. We need to use the good offices open to us to encourage a much more flexible approach so that we can take further advantage of the opportunities out there.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister has talked about the framework 7 programme. On a recent visit to Europe, we were told about the European social fund and how it is undergoing a lot of change. They are going to try to remove risk and reduce bureaucracy. What interaction has your Department had with our European partners on that important issue?

Mr Speaker: I must say to Members before the Minister answers that they need to continually rise in their places. Rising once will not get you a supplementary question.

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair for his question and welcome him back to these shores. It is an area in which we will want to have constant engagement with the European Commission and one for which we look to expand the office in Brussels so that we can take it forward.

It is important that we stress that the European social fund has been a major boon to Northern Ireland and to the work of my Department. When we look negatively at Europe, as is sometimes our wont in Northern Ireland — which is something I much regret — it is important that we do not lose sight of the importance of the different European funds and how they bring money into Northern Ireland. Whole swathes of work are undertaken by my Department and through different funding partners whereby we support a lot of community and voluntary interventions, in relation to employability skills in particular, dealing with people who are entirely outside the labour market. That simply would not happen without the assistance of the European Union and, in particular, the European social fund. It is something we will keep a very close eye on.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his responses and his sound pro-European stance.

I had the good fortune recently to visit Brussels along with our colleague Basil McCrea, and we had a very interesting series of meetings and consultations on framework programme 7. I pay tribute to the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels, which is doing a good job, but would it not be appropriate for the Minister to send an official from his Department to that office to augment the complement there and bring about a benefit to its work?

Dr Farry: I take on board the Member's comments, and the spirit in which they were made. There will be four additional staff in that office, and I assume that the intention is to cover the breadth of the different Northern Ireland Departments. Each of the 12 Departments has different types of interaction with Brussels. If we ended up with all 12 Departments sending out departmental representatives, I imagine that there could be accusations of overstaffing and questions over whether that is a wise use of resources. Therefore, it is important that we try to pool resources as best we can. I am very keen to make sure that the voice of my Department and those interests are best represented. The current and newly proposed arrangements should be more than adequate in that regard. However, if they are not,

we will keep them under review and come back looking for a stronger voice in the future.

Mr Speaker: Once again, a Member is continually looking up at the Chair. Members might need some training in and around rising in their place to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I, too, was on the trip to Brussels. *[Interruption.]* For research and development purposes, Mr Speaker. I recognise that Mr McCrea is far-sighted and a man of vision. He can look to the future on those areas of skills development, and I appreciated the input that he had on the trip.

Reference was made to the work that is done by the University of Ulster and Queen's University, but surely, as in other countries, there are examples that should be encouraged. Further education colleges elsewhere are engaged in research and development work — some to a very high standard, comparable to that of a university —

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

Mr Newton: We should encourage further education colleges in Northern Ireland to become involved in research and development.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Newton for his question. It is a pity that the Chairperson of the Committee does not have an opportunity to respond to the very leading comments that the Member made.

I take on board the point that the Member makes about further education colleges and their strength in research and development. My Department has an innovation fund, which we are currently examining, that aims to support colleges in how they engage with the business community and in developing new products, services and ideas. The fund is doing extremely well, and we have a number of very good success stories, but, again, there is still room for improvement.

The other point that is worth stressing to Members is that our research and development in Northern Ireland is overly focused on the university sector, with support from the further education sector, and it is not as developed as the private business sector compared with other regions of the European Union and further afield. Therefore, there is an issue.

As much as we encourage research through universities, and I certainly intend to continue doing that, equally we must encourage the private sector to engage in research and development so that we have a more balanced offering, like we do in many other aspects of our economy.

Careers Advice

2. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the current economic climate, what action his Department is taking to ensure that young people receive the most up-to-date careers advice. (AQO 899/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's Careers Service and analytical services team, in conjunction with the sector skills councils, develop and maintain appropriate labour market information, which is used by careers advisers to ensure that young people receive the most up-to-date careers advice.

Sector skills councils gather robust and reliable sectoral intelligence, which is a vital part of the skills and workforce planning and development process.

To date, 25 industry fact-sheets have been developed. They provide information on job prospects, relevant skills and entry requirements, as well as highlighting opportunities. All careers advisers are professionally qualified and receive regular professional development to ensure that they are fully up to date with all current and future skills shortages and opportunities.

The careers service has in place partnership agreements with 99% of post-primary schools across Northern Ireland. Those agreements allow schools, in consultation with careers advisers, the opportunity to select from a suite of services appropriate to the needs of their pupils. That includes the offer of an individual careers guidance interview for all year 12 pupils before they decide on their career pathways. Last year, over 20,000 individual career guidance interviews were delivered by careers advisers from my Department. All year 10 pupils are also offered assistance through the provision of group sessions, class talks and parents' evenings. Work is also undertaken with years 13 and 14 pupils on higher education, training and employment choices. In addition, careers advisers provide advice and guidance to young people in training and in further education colleges. That is to ensure that they are aware of the importance of improving qualifications and the up-to-date position regarding the current and future skills needs of employers in Northern Ireland.

Mr Spratt: Does the Minister recognise the difficulty that many university graduates are experiencing in getting jobs in today's economic climate? What is his Department doing to encourage young people to apply for more vocational jobs or apprenticeships?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Spratt for his question. I do not think that anyone is under any illusions regarding the difficulty that people, particularly young people, are having with unemployment and poor job prospects in Northern Ireland. That applies as much to graduates as it does to anyone else. Nevertheless, it is important that we continue to send out the message that going to university and achieving a degree is a very positive investment for any young person. Figures show that a person with a degree stands a much higher prospect of finding a job than someone without a degree. My Department's skills strategy indicates that the jobs profile in Northern Ireland is going to change significantly over the next 10 years and that we will need more and more people with degree level or equivalent qualifications.

It is critical that the careers service ensures that the advice on the labour market that we are providing is up to date and that, although we accept and respect the choices that people make regarding their future career, we ensure that they do so with as much information as possible on which careers are attractive and opening and which are more competitive and difficult to get into. If we provide that, people will be able to make choices on where there is the highest level of growth and where they will have the best success in building their careers.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí

seo. What action is the Minister's Department taking to ensure that there is better joined-up thinking between his Department, the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Flanagan for his supplementary question. He raises an issue that I am mindful of, as are the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Education. I have regular formal meetings with my colleagues, and those are proving to be very useful. At those meetings, we flag up issues that are of mutual interest and areas where there are opportunities and, indeed, about which there are concerns. The Member will appreciate that careers is an area that cuts across my Department and the Department of Education. We have a careers policy in place. It is something that we will want to review within the next couple of years. Although there are aspects that I may wish to move ahead with, I think that both Departments will have a strong interest in having a broad-based review, and I am sure that there is a commitment to doing so within the next couple of years.

Mr P Ramsey: Given the increasing numbers of young people across Northern Ireland who are finding themselves not in education, employment or training, is the Minister content with the quality of careers advice that is being given in schools as part of the wider skills agenda?

Dr Farry: That is something that we will have to look at in the review. In my main answer, I highlighted that we had access to 99% of the post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. I would love that to be 100%. We are almost there, so good progress is being made in that regard. All of our careers advisers are professionals; it is something for which they receive specific training.

I am keen to look at where there are gaps and deficiencies in the current offering and to close them. I am keen to focus more on lifelong learning and careers. We sometimes think of careers advice as applying only to 16- and 18-year-olds as they leave school or university. However, people need to consider careers advice throughout their lives as it is rare for someone to stay in the same career, never mind the same job, for their entire working life. People will be looking to change careers, and it is important for us to make the service as accessible as possible for everybody.

2.45 pm

Mr Lyttle: How satisfied is the Minister with the Department of Education's contribution to careers guidance in our schools? How are we measuring the success of careers guidance outcomes in our schools?

Dr Farry: I respect the partnership and the engagement that we have. However, we have two Departments that move at different paces because we have to implement different aspects of the current careers strategy. Both Departments monitor the issue closely, and both Ministers are very mindful of it. It is of great interest to me and to the Member. All Members need to give the issue their increased attention over the coming months and years.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Queen's University Belfast: Oversubscribed Courses

4. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the oversubscription to the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes at Queen's University Belfast in areas such as food quality, safety and nutrition; land use and environmental management, and agricultural technology. (AQO 901/11-15)

Dr Farry: Queen's University has confirmed that for the 2011-12 academic year, there were 474 applications for undergraduate degree courses offered by the university's Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use in areas related to food quality, safety and nutrition, land use and environmental management and agricultural technology, with 85 students admitted. That compares with 406 applications and 78 students admitted in the previous academic year. For 2011-12 postgraduate entry, 49 applications were received for areas of research carried out by the Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use, with six students enrolled. I welcome the healthy demand for those agrifood courses and research studentships and recognise the important role that Northern Ireland's higher education institutions play in supplying the sector with appropriately skilled individuals.

Similarly, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has confirmed that the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise is also experiencing increased demand for its agrifood courses, with total enrolments on further and higher education courses exceeding 1,000 for the first time in October this year.

A number of courses in the agrifood sector are also available at the University of Ulster and at institutions in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The Department will continue to provide financial support for eligible students from Northern Ireland who choose undergraduate degree courses at higher education institutions in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland in the 2012-13 academic year.

Mr Frew: How does the Minister intend to increase those numbers when we are so oversubscribed? It is a very important sector, there is great growth in that area, and it is leading the country out of recession. What more can his Department do to increase the number of students here in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Frew for his supplementary question. I recognise the importance of the agrifood sector. I met representatives of that sector recently to talk about its skill requirements as it spans the full spectrum of skills training that we have on offer in Northern Ireland. I have no immediate plans to increase the number of places. It is not my role to increase the number of places; it is a matter for the institutions to respond to the demand. However, no doubt the Member is aware that, on the back of the agreement of the Executive on the future of university funding and tuition fees in Northern Ireland, we secured some additional resources to allow us to expand university places in the first instance, with the option of going back for more. There is a commitment that those will all be within economically relevant science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, and the key issue is whether some of the agrifood courses will fall into that category. However, that will be for the universities to consider, based on the

level of demand. Nevertheless, the door of opportunity is open in that regard.

Mr Cree: Has the Minister any indication as to whether the demand for university places is rising or falling, and what action does he propose to take?

Dr Farry: Clearly, there is increased demand in the specific area of agrifoods, which the question addressed. I think that that reflects the consolidation and growth of that sector in Northern Ireland. We are expecting a higher level of demand overall for higher education places in Northern Ireland on the back of the very welcome decision that we took to essentially freeze tuition fees in line with inflation. That decision was taken in comparison with what was happening in other jurisdictions. Our decision will almost certainly lead to increased demand, in that local students will wish to stay in Northern Ireland, whereas previous cohorts might have considered going to Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland. We do not yet know how big that increase will be, which is why we have made an initial investment for additional places. If necessary, we also have the option of going back to the Executive for more funding to meet increased local demand.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, and I thank the Minister for his answers. What does the Employment and Skills Advisory Group, which the Department set up, say about employment opportunities in the area of food quality, safety and nutrition?

Dr Farry: I thank Ms Boyle for her question. Similar to my other answers, I will say that we recognise fully that that is an area of potential growth in Northern Ireland. It is also an area from which Northern Ireland is tending to export. The whole drift of the Executive's economic strategy and, indeed, those aspects of the Programme for Government that deal with the economy are about encouraging more export-led growth. We have an existing base for that in the agrifood sector, and there is potential for more. It is also important that we look at the average level of salaries and at how they contribute to the economy. Certainly, my Department stands ready to give any assistance that is required to address the specific needs of any high-growth sector in our economy, and we are very willing to talk to the sector about that.

Graduate Employment

5. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what specific action he is taking to support graduates in finding employment. (AQO 902/11-15)

Dr Farry: The recession and difficulties in the labour market have made it more difficult for many people, graduates and non-graduates alike, to find and to keep a job. That is true in Northern Ireland, the UK as a whole and the Republic of Ireland. The latest data show that 73% of full-time students from Northern Ireland who graduated in 2009-2010 were in work six months after graduation, compared with 71% for the UK as a whole.

My Department has a range of initiatives in place to help graduates to find work. For example, more than 700 graduates have participated in the Department's entry into management programme, which is known as INTRO, and 89% of those who completed that programme went on to attain full-time employment. In addition, 193 graduates

have gained relevant work experience on the graduate acceleration programme since it was introduced last year, and, of those, 51% have moved into employment.

My Department also works in collaboration with Invest Northern Ireland, offering other programmes, such as the assured skills programme, which includes graduate conversion programmes, and the software testers academy. The software testers academy is a 14-week training programme that includes a six-week placement with a leading IT company to provide graduates with the skills and experience that are required to apply for software testing opportunities in the IT industry. That academy is aimed primarily at non-IT graduates, and successful participants will gain an industry-recognised qualification and a potential offer of employment. The Careers Service works closely with the employment service to support unemployed graduates. A pilot exercise involving collaboration with the Law Society to support unemployed law graduates was well received by clients, and consideration will be given to how that type of support can be extended to other sectors.

Future prospects for graduates will be linked to the performance of the labour market, particularly at local level. I trust that the initiatives that my Department outlined and that were mentioned in the draft Programme for Government and the draft economic strategy, which Executive parties support, will enhance people's job prospects, not least those of graduates. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that many commentators remain apprehensive about the prospects for the local, national and European economies.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. He mentioned the GAP NI scheme. Will he reassure the House that all is being done with colleagues in the Department for Social Development (DSD), particularly those in the jobs and benefits office, to make sure that they know about such schemes and their advantages so that graduates can be informed?

Dr Farry: Just to give some background to that, the graduate acceleration programme is part of the Steps to Work programme that my employment service offers.

The programme is delivered using a flexible multi-based approach and is adapted to meet the needs of individual participants. Within the 26-week qualification strands of Steps to Work, the graduate acceleration programme has been specifically developed to meet the needs of unemployed graduates. That element offers them the opportunity to have a work placement and to undertake a qualification to enhance their employability on the back of that. It would not necessarily fall under DSD's remit. When people on jobseeker's allowance come through to my employment service advisers, they will be picked up. We will wish to encourage any graduates in that direction.

It is a scheme that has been developed to recognise the fact that some people entering Steps to Work have advanced skills, in particular employability skills, and that the general scheme was not appropriate for them. Therefore, the GAP programme exists to provide tailored assistance to people in those circumstances.

Mr Campbell: The Minister outlined the fact that 51% of those who completed the acceleration programme moved into employment. One would presume, therefore, that up to 49% did not. Given that very high rate of graduates being

unsuccessful in obtaining employment, has the Minister looked at the numbers of student places for coming years?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Campbell for his question. First, the figure of 51% needs to be looked at in the context of overall levels of graduate employment and, on the contrary, graduate unemployment. It is still better than the population as a whole. Obviously, we are in very difficult and challenging economic times. While we can do a lot to work on people's skills and to give people opportunities, unless demand in the wider labour market gives rise to job opportunities, there will always be difficulty as regards how far we can go to get people into permanent placements. However, we will do everything that we can in that regard. It signals the importance of the Executive working together to address the economy as a whole and to provide people with those opportunities.

We need to give employers a very clear message about the importance of giving people work experience opportunities and work placements. A number of employers in Northern Ireland are very good in that regard. However, a lot more can be done. It is important that we signal to employers that it is not just about their giving something back to society but it is an investment for their companies. If they take someone on board, they may find that that person has the skills and ability to make a contribution to their company. They may offer that person a full-time job on the back of the work placement. We need to encourage employers to think a lot more about work placements.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister detail what efforts are being made in our local universities — Queen's and the University of Ulster — to help build up a spirit of entrepreneurship among students and to make a real difference in developing their business skills?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McElduff for his question, which highlights an important aspect of what is happening in universities. We are beginning to see a change in culture. It is no longer simply a case of people being encouraged to go down the narrow route of a degree and become qualified in just that particular subject. It is important that, throughout their time at university, students look to a whole range of employability schemes. In particular, we come across people who have had a very good idea and have done work on a product that is potentially marketable. However, unless those students are able to access training in business skills or to have access to business mentors, there is a difficulty in bringing those products to market. It is not only the student who loses out; our economy loses out if we are not able to deliver innovation from the core ideas into products that actually make a difference to our economy and boost our manufacturing and, ultimately, our export base.

Regional Development

A5 Road Project: Statutory Notifications

1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his departmental officials, in conjunction with Roads Service A5 project team, have all the necessary

statutory notifications prepared and ready to be put in place to enable the A5 project to commence after the public inquiry report is published. (AQO 913/11-15)

3.00 pm

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the inspectors are currently considering the merits of all issues that were presented at the A5 public inquiry hearings. It is expected that they will report back to the Department in January 2012. Officials from my Department will then consider the issues and recommendations that arise from the report. Where recommendations are accepted, they will be incorporated into the design, and the notices for the final statutory orders will be revised accordingly. You will appreciate that the notices associated with the statutory orders cannot be amended until the inspectors' report is received and final decisions are made on the project.

After the recent announcement from the Irish Government about the funding for the A5 and A8 projects, I will consider spending priorities across my Department when the budget for the A5 and other projects is confirmed.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he confirm whether the capital funding for the A5 project is earmarked? Has all the necessary preparatory work been carried out by the Roads Service project team?

Mr Speaker: Before the Minister answers, I remind the House that this question is specifically about the A5. There will be an opportunity during questions 3, 6, 8 and 10 to widen out the subject, but this question is specifically on the A5.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for that guidance. I also thank the Member for his supplementary question. The recent announcement by the Irish Government has meant that it is necessary to have a discussion on funding issues. The Member will be aware that it was agreed at the recent North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting that officials from my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in the Irish Republic will have discussions about the A5. I expect those discussions to take place in January 2012. It is important that I await the findings of the inspectors' report in case there are issues that have to be incorporated into the statutory approvals.

Lord Morrow: The A5 public inquiry was based on the presumption that the Republic's Government would supply some £400 million. Since we now know that that will not be the case, why is the Minister waiting for the outcome of that inquiry when he knows quite well that it will not go on in its present form?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I would also be grateful if the Member would, at some stage, indicate his preference as to the route of the proposed A5. We have never had the benefit of that guidance from Lord Morrow. He and other Members will understand that it is important that the inspectors' report is assessed for any changes that may arise to the route or the potential statutory approvals that may be required. That could impact on the overall scheme whenever funding is available.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers. In your previous answer, you mentioned a meeting in January 2012 between your officials and their counterparts in Dublin. Will you outline the terms of reference for that meeting?

Mr Kennedy: No.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister accept that the outcome of the public inquiry cannot be taken for granted, especially as fewer than 6,800 vehicles a day use sections of the route? Furthermore, does he agree that it would be very wasteful if people's lives and properties were blighted, potentially for decades, by a road that may not be built?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I think that it is clear to all Members that the recent announcement by the Irish Government about their contribution to overall funding will have clear implications for the type and nature of the A5 scheme.

It will undoubtedly impact on my Department's spending priorities and on those of the Executive. I am happy to indicate to the House that I am prepared to make bids for any available money to spend on road projects all over Northern Ireland, including the A5 project and others.

Mr Allister: Given the death blow that was delivered to the grandiose A5 scheme by the Republic's breach of promise, does the Minister agree that it would be far more relevant now to go through the necessary processes and preparations for other projects that are viable and that can be made ready swiftly so that they are ready to go?

Mr Kennedy: I advise the Member that we are doing that.

DRD: Investment Strategy

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the implications of the draft investment strategy for his Department. (AQO 914/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the publication of the draft investment strategy, which sets out the proposed capital allocations to Departments for 2011-2021. However, I continue to have a number of concerns regarding the indicative allocations to my Department for water, public transport and roads between 2015 and 2021.

The draft investment strategy for Northern Ireland proposes £600 million of investment for water and waste water for the six years beyond the Budget period. That will enable us to maintain the current high standards of drinking water quality. However, we face significant challenges in improving the standards of waste water collection and treatment to meet European quality requirements, such as the water framework directive.

The proposed allocations for public transport could be consumed in total by the rapid transit project during 2015-16 and 2016-17, thereby leaving pressures in pursuing Translink projects such as bus and train replacement and maintaining a safe and reliable rail network.

The indicative allocation for roads over the 2015-2021 period is around £195 million per annum, excluding the

Republic of Ireland receipts in relation to the A5 and A8. That will enable my Department to take forward a programme of structural maintenance, albeit targeted primarily at the strategic road network, along with a programme of minor capital works, while leaving in the region of £100 million per annum for strategic road improvements.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his reply. Given the reduced capital funds available and the uncertainty over future funding, does the Minister agree that it is vital that all future capital investment for roads is carefully assessed so that the benefits to the economy and to the citizens of Northern Ireland are maximised, in respect of removal of traffic congestion and improvements to travel times and road safety?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I absolutely agree: I think that it is crucial, in these times of economic constraint when budgets are clearly under pressure, that not just every pound but every penny is spent wisely and to the maximum benefit of the people whom we have the honour to represent. I see it as being my role as transport Minister to seek to improve the strategic road network in not just one part of Northern Ireland but all over. I hope that I will have the help and co-operation of Members of the House and the Executive.

Mr Byrne: Can the Minister say whether the Department's capital spending will centre on trying to achieve economic development for the region overall, including balanced regional development?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. It is clear that the Executive's priority will be to regenerate the local economy, and I think that transport issues and regional development policy will very much play into that. I hope that that can be recognised and properly funded. As a member of the Executive, I certainly want to play my part in improving road links and transport networks all over Northern Ireland, with a view to improving the economic prospects of the entire population.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his responses to date. Has he any intention of bringing up any planned improvements to the A4/N16, which links Belfast and Sligo, at the next NSMC meeting in transport sectoral format?

Mr Kennedy: The strict answer to the question is no.

Roads: A2, A5, A6 and A8

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the amount of funding allocated in his budget for the A6 dualling scheme, whether this would be sufficient to include the Dungiven bypass project. (AQO 915/11-15)

6. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the funding implications of the announcement by the Irish Government that they will no longer be able to meet their funding commitments to the A5 and A8 road projects. (AQO 918/11-15)

8. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Regional Development if the A2 upgrade project will be included in his review of the spending priorities for the strategic roads improvement programme. (AQO 920/11-15)

10. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his most recent discussions with the Irish Government in relation to the funding for the A5 project. (AQO 922/11-15)

Mr Speaker: Will the Member repeat the question number?

Mr Ó hOisín: Ceist uimhir 3. I asked question number 3.

Mr Kennedy: Sorry, Mr Speaker; my English is not as good as yours. With your permission, I would like to reply to questions 3, 6, 8 and 10 together as they concern similar or related issues.

As you are aware, the A5 and A8 dual carriageway schemes have been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government. At the North/South Ministerial Council plenary meeting on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of more funding by the Irish Government for progression of the A5 and A8 projects is being deferred and that, in that regard, the Irish Government will provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the project. The relevant Departments are now preparing a new funding and implementation plan for the two projects for agreement at the next NSMC transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC plenary meeting. That process will, undoubtedly, affect the funding that is available to my Department and, therefore, potentially, delivery of the strategic roads programme.

When the funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across the Department, including the impact on the strategic roads programme. That will address the progression of schemes such as improvements to the A2/Shore Road in Greenisland and the A6, which include the sections between Londonderry and Dungiven and Randalstown and Castledawson. The Dungiven bypass is an element of the larger A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway scheme. Funding has not been provided specifically to commence that scheme in the current budget period.

My Department's Road Service expects to publish an environmental statement draft direction order and draft vesting order in early December 2011 for the 30 km dual carriageway from Londonderry to Dungiven, including the dual carriageway bypass off Dungiven. Publication of those orders will invite formal comment and objection, which will most likely lead to a public inquiry in 2012 to examine the case for and against the scheme. Roads Service has advised that there is no merit at this stage in decoupling the Dungiven bypass element of the overall project. If deemed necessary, it could be done at a later date. The issue will be kept under review.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he not agree that, without decoupling, the Dungiven bypass aspect could be held hostage to the completion of the entire A6 project? Would delivery of the bypass as a stand-alone project not be a more prudent use of resources at this time?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am aware that he has made representations consistently on the issue of the Dungiven bypass and has raised the subject of decoupling from the main scheme. With regard to necessary statutory approvals and legal processes that we are due to complete, my Department's officials continue to advise that, at this stage, there is no merit in decoupling the scheme, although we are prepared to review that. However, as we work our way through the various stages, we will, of course, keep the House and the Member informed.

Mr B McCrea: I commend the Minister for the efficiency of his answers thus far. Given that we have discussed at some length the implications of the absence of funding from the Republic of Ireland, can he tell the House whether there is any other way that he could raise funding for the road, such as by toll or bond? Is it the case that the road is simply uneconomical and threatens the viability of other good projects?

3.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful, I think, to the Member for his supplementary question. The issue is still under consideration and work is ongoing by officials to decide the best way forward. As I said in a previous answer, it is clear that the recent decision by the Irish Government will have a significant impact on the original scheme. Therefore, we need to be in a position to bring forward and spend the money that has been allocated in this budgetary period on sections of the A5, the A8 and other road schemes across Northern Ireland.

As transport Minister, I want to enhance the strategic road network. Mention was made of other schemes. Those include the A6, the A26, the A2 and the A4 Enniskillen bypass, which was mentioned by the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. All of those projects are worthy of consideration. The fact that they extend all over Northern Ireland is proof that there is interest. It is also proof that people want to see how we can improve the strategic road network.

Mr Hilditch: Bearing in mind the state of readiness of the A2 and the £16 million cost that has been attributed to the scheme, are we not in a position to help the building industry by looking seriously at that and by making some announcements in the next few weeks?

Mr Kennedy: I again acknowledge the interest of the Member, his constituency colleagues and the local councils that are involved in the A2 scheme. However, before construction work can begin on site, it will be necessary for several important stages to be successfully completed. Those include a pre-qualification competition for suitable tenderers, the subsequent tendering procedure, and, finally, the preparations by the successful contractor to commence work on site. It is envisaged that the minimum time needed to complete those procedures is one year.

Mr Dickson: I want to add to the comments made by my colleague from East Antrim. Having spent £16 million and given that, as the Minister suggested, we are only one year out, does the Minister agree with me that the A2 scheme should be at the top of his list of priorities?

Mr Kennedy: The Member is teasing me to give him the answer that he wants. We are still considering all of those

issues, and the A2 features along with a number of other projects. There is no want of trying by the Member and his constituency colleagues in the representations that they have made. I encourage him to keep banging his drum in the way that I bang mine.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm whether the funding will be negated if we were to go ahead with a section of either the A5 or A8?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The funding scenario has clearly changed after the announcement by the Irish Government. I remind the House that, because the A5/A8 scheme was an Executive priority, it is legally the case that, if the project were not to proceed, the money will go back to the centre. It is my job, as Minister for Regional Development, with my responsibility for roads, to identify schemes that we can spend that money on effectively and efficiently to improve the road network all over Northern Ireland. That includes the A5 and the A8. I do not want to be in a situation in which the Executive have to hand money back to the Treasury, having given the excuse that they cannot spend it. I can spend shedloads of money on road improvements all over Northern Ireland.

Roads: Grit Boxes

4. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider improving the application process for the installation of grit boxes. (AQO 916/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I assume that the Member's question relates to the criteria used by my Department's Roads Service for assessing applications for salt bins. The winter service policy and procedures operated by Roads Service follow the well-established practice of targeting the limited resources that are available for this service on the busier main through routes. However, the policy also provides some consideration for roads that are adopted and maintained by Roads Service but which do not qualify for inclusion on the gritting schedule. In such cases, salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public on a self-help basis.

The current policy does not limit the numbers of salt bins or grit piles in any area, provided the required criteria are met. However, salt bins are not normally provided within 100 metres of another bin. Roads Service already commits significant resources to maintaining approximately 4,500 salt bins and almost 40,000 grit piles provided on public roads. On the basis that salt bins and grit piles are replenished on average two and a half times during a typical winter season at a cost of approximately £70 and £15 respectively, that equates to an overall spend of nearly £1 million. In light of that commitment and increased budgetary pressures, I currently have no plans to review the criteria used for the provision of grit boxes. However, if the Member has some suggestions that he considers would improve the application process, I will ask my officials to consider them.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his answer. With the first snow over the past day or so, this is going to be a matter of concern to a lot of residents, including older people. Has the Minister assessed the cost-efficiency of rolling out a more proactive scheme of grit box installation? I seek his assurance that any schemes that have been approved in

advance of today will be installed before we get into the depth of winter this month.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He is indeed right; over the weekend, we have seen the advent of wintry conditions, and I hope that everyone will be able to travel safely in the coming period. Roads Service officials have been working very hard to provide gritting on the road network, and I know that that is appreciated by Members of the House and other public representatives.

Over 300 staff, some on a nightly basis, will be helping to create safer conditions across the road network. Members will know that it is not possible, nor economically sensible, to promise to grit every single road and every pathway. That is why salt bins and grit piles play an important role. I want to encourage people to help their neighbours, provide self-help in areas and avail themselves of the salt bins and grit piles as much as they possibly can. In answer to the Member's question, I have no current plans to conduct a review, but all those matters are kept on an ongoing review basis, and I hope and expect that where new sites are identified, salt bins or grit piles would be in place for the coming weeks and, perhaps, months.

Mr Storey: I am somewhat disappointed that the Minister has no plans to review the criteria, especially in light of some concerns that he is aware of and that have been raised by some of my colleagues, Michelle McIlveen in particular, about the grading that he has used in the criteria. Those have resulted in situations in which disabled people and elderly people cannot meet the criteria and are left clearly at a disadvantage. That has happened in some areas in my constituency. Will the Minister assure the House that he will revisit that element of the criteria with particular regard for elderly people and disabled people?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. He will be aware that there is a register for particular users, from an emergency medical background, that can give assistance. One of the benefits of using the current criteria is that the policy ensures that over a quarter of the total road network, which carries over three quarters of all traffic, is salted. That is achieved through fair and objective criteria. If the Member has particular concerns on behalf of constituents or about local roads, I ask him to contact the local section office to see whether officials can consider the road in question for inclusion on the gritting schedule.

Mr McDevitt: At Question Time a year ago, I asked the Minister's predecessor what assurances he could offer us in the face of the imminence of winter that things would be better. What assurances can this Minister offer the people of Northern Ireland that improvements have been made since last year? Specifically, will he outline what new co-operation protocols are in place with local government and other statutory agencies so that the disastrous situation that unfolded last year does not unfold this year?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am working very hard, as are my officials and all staff in the Department, to try to ensure that we make provision for the winter conditions that are now upon us. I can confirm for the Member that some 110,000 tons of salt has been purchased for distribution

along the road network. That is effectively twice the amount that we normally expect to use in what is termed a "normal winter", whatever that is. Last year, we had very abnormal conditions.

Considerable progress has been made in getting some agreement at section office level with local councils, and I encourage all the councils in Northern Ireland to avail themselves of the co-operation map that is available so that town centres and village centres, or specifically identified roads, are covered. It would not be sensible for me to say that every footpath and every roadway will be gritted, because that is not possible. However, a level of co-operation is possible between Roads Service and local government, and I hope that it can be maximised. I know that many councils have already signed up to that and are working well. I encourage that, and I also encourage elected Members and representatives to play their part in identifying any problems and to contact their local section office, the Department or me about that issue. I am very hopeful that, working together, we can have a better outcome. However, I cannot legislate for bad weather.

Rural Roads: Winter Weather

5. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's plans to keep traffic moving in rural areas in the event of severe winter weather conditions. (AQO 917/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service carries out a significant amount of pre-planning to ensure a state of readiness for the coming winter service season. As well as a number of routine pre-season checks, planning includes ensuring that adequate staffing arrangements are in place, including training for new staff where required, that all winter service equipment is in working order and that stocks of salt are adequate. Last year, as I have indicated, salt stocks amounted to some 65,000 tons. However, we have reviewed that assessment and now have approximately 110,000 tons. The salt barns that are strategically placed in depots throughout Northern Ireland are filled to capacity, and arrangements are in place to supplement stocks of salt during the winter period if necessary.

Roads Service salts main through routes that carry more than 1,500 vehicles a day. In exceptional circumstances, roads that carry between 1,000 and 1,500 vehicles a day will also be salted. The application of that policy ensures that almost one third of the total road network, which carries around four fifths of all traffic, is salted. However, local roads are not overlooked, and small settlements in rural areas containing 100 dwellings or more are provided with salted links to the nearest road on the main salted network.

3.30 pm

Priority secondary salting is provided to around 50 rural schools that are most affected by the adverse weather conditions. In addition, salting may also be undertaken in urgent situations, such as to provide access for the emergency services; unforeseen circumstances, such as funerals; or to help to get fuel or feed stocks to farmers. Arrangements are also in place to use farmers and contractors to assist in clearing snow from local roads and for the provision of approximately 4,200 salt bins and almost 40,000 grit piles on public roads.

Private Members' Business

Public Sector Pensions

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

That this Assembly believes that the proposed increases in public sector pension contributions are wrong and unjustified and that they will have a significant adverse impact on many workers; calls on the British Government to respond positively to the trade unions' proposals on pension reform and funding; and further calls on the Executive to review and reverse their decision of September 2011 to impose a 3.2% increase on contributions by members of the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee scheme.
— [Mr Durkan.]

Which amendments were:

(1) Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:

"recognises the fundamental changes to public sector pension provision across the United Kingdom; expresses disappointment that a resolution could not be found and that strike action was deemed necessary by trade unions; and calls on the trade unions and the UK Government to continue negotiations with a view to finding a solution and preventing further strike action in the future on this matter." — [Mr Cree.]

(2) Leave out all after "Executive" and insert:

"to respond to this imposition in a manner which excludes members of the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee scheme; notes the proposal by the Minister of Education to exclude all other public sector workers who earn less than £32,000 per year; and calls on all Ministers to explore similar options."
— [Mr McLaughlin.]

Mr Agnew: I declare an interest in that both my partner and my mother are public sector workers. Although I will obviously not be signing off on any decision on pensions, it is important that Members declare any past, present or potential future interests.

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

During the strikes I went out to the picket lines not only at Massey Avenue but at the Ulster Hospital and the station in my constituency, and I also joined the rally. I listened to the concerns of public sector workers, and it is right to do so. I have listened to unionists on the other side of the House, by which I mean unionists from political parties as opposed to trade unionists. On the one hand, they have said that they support the right to strike, but, on the other hand, they seem to condemn people for using their right to strike. Indeed, many Members crossed the picket lines. That is a shame, because we are served well by public sector workers.

I have heard the argument about the inconvenience caused by the strikes, but that only highlights how important to our way of life are the services that the workers will have provided 364 days of this year, particularly in the health service, where they are literally saving lives. They are the heroes of our society, and it is a shame that some in the media have sought to make villains of those people. Across

many debates when we discuss our public servants, health workers and teachers, we, rightly, talk about the quality job that they do for us, our children and our families. However, when they called for our help and support, many of us were found wanting and crossed picket lines. I condemn that.

There has been much talk about the Assembly's role in pensions. In many cases, it is a reserved matter, and it has been said that there is little that we can do. However, when a proposal was made on what the Assembly can do on the NILGOSC pensions scheme, everyone jumped up and down and said that we cannot do that. The danger of breaking parity has been talked about, particularly by Members from the DUP and Ulster Unionist Party. There may be some genuine concerns, but where are our negotiating skills now? On the danger of breaking parity with the rest of the UK on corporation tax, we are reassured by Members on that side of the House that they are in negotiation with the UK Government to ensure that any impact on the Northern Ireland block grant is minimised. Why can we not have the same support for our public sector workers? Why are our Ministers not negotiating with the UK Government on public sector pensions?

Why are they willing to go over and lobby on behalf of the multinational companies that operate in Northern Ireland but will not go over and negotiate on behalf of our public sector workers? That is what they should be doing and what we should continue to do. It is not for just the unions to negotiate but for our Ministers. We are a devolved institution but we should be seeking to engage constructively with the UK Government to ensure the best deal for our public sector workers.

Mr Nesbitt mentioned fuel poverty. It is an issue of great concern to the House and certainly to me. I spoke about it a number of times, particularly in relation to the green new deal and the benefits that that can bring in alleviating fuel poverty. However, we have to make sure that the workers of today do not become the fuel-poor pensioners of tomorrow by ensuring, first and foremost, that they are properly remunerated.

I support the motion. I will not support the Ulster Unionist amendment, which I see as a sideswipe at the unions.

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

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank all the Members who took part in the debate, even though, given how little was said about pensions, and how many Members waved the flag and told us how much they supported the strikers and did not go through picket lines and refused to break the strike, I suspect that a lot of this has been about grandstanding rather than what we can genuinely do about the pension problem that we have here in Northern Ireland, across the United Kingdom and, indeed, wider afield as we can see from the actions of other Governments not just in the UK and the Republic of Ireland but across Europe.

I will, at the very start, outline the context in which all of this takes place. As a number of Members rightly pointed out, this did not arise because some dyed-in-the-wool Tory decided, "How can I get the boot into the workers?" This is as a result of an investigation undertaken by a former

Labour Minister who was tasked with looking at what to do about public pensions at a time when the expectations of pensioners are rising, people are living longer, public finances are under pressure, we find that we are facing an increasing pension bill and, as some Members pointed out, the percentage of GDP that goes towards pensions has doubled over the past number of years. That was the problem.

I met Lord Hutton when he was doing the investigations for his report and was pleased that his view of life was not that he wanted to drive public sector pensions down to the lowest level but that he wanted to preserve what he believed was good in public sector pensions. In doing so, however, a price had to be paid and a reality to be faced up to. He pointed out in his final report, as some Members rightly pointed out, that the final salary pension arrangements in the public sector were unsustainable financially for the reasons that I have given.

He recommended their replacement with alternative models. He wanted to move from final salary to career average, and retirement age linked to the state pension age, which meant, of course, that the age at which people would receive their pension would go up in line with pension age. He also wanted the cost of pension provision to be shared more equitably between public service employees and taxpayers, hence the increase in contributions. Let us not forget that the alternatives to people who receive the pension paying for their pension are that the taxpayer pays for them or that they are paid for through reduced public services.

I listened to the likes of Mr Agnew, who said that we have to value the public services that those people provide. Of course we do, but from where are we going to get the funds to provide those public services if we expect, at the same time, the burden for pensions to be borne by the public purse or the taxpayer?

The last thing that he said was that the accrued rights of current employees should be protected. That is the policy that has been adopted by the coalition Government. Looking at what has happened in other jurisdictions, I think that at least Lord Hutton's principles, which have been agreed by the coalition Government, are much better than what we have seen in the Irish Republic, for example.

The SDLP and Sinn Féin would point us towards the Irish Republic and say, "There is where your destiny lies." We do not have a Government that create a situation where people, after paying over the years for their pensions and getting to pension age, suddenly find that the contract has been slashed and that they do not get the payments that they expected. It is significant that the two parties that have opposed the reforms most vehemently in the House are the ones that point us to the Republic and say, "There is where your destiny lies." The coalition Government have not gone down the route of the Republic, and the accrued rights of current employees will be protected.

I take issue with Sinn Féin, because it is as if it never ever signed up to the position adopted by the Executive. I see Mr Maskey in the Chamber. Some Members were asking whether he was Saul or Paul and whether he had had that bright shining light experience where he changed his ways — a "road to Da-Maskey experience", perhaps. From what

he said, his party may as well never have signed up to what went through the Executive.

Despite the fact that the Environment Minister sought to wriggle out of his commitments as an Executive Minister, the Executive signed up to three things. First, we were committed to the principle of delivering a targeted level of savings to the cost of public sector pension schemes in Northern Ireland, subject to the details of how those savings will be delivered being worked through over time. Secondly, we agreed to adopt a consistent approach for each of the different public sector pension schemes. Thirdly, we agreed to authorise engagement with unions to discuss a graduated approach that protects lower-paid public sector workers. That is what we have agreed to.

Members can say that that is signing up to Tory Party cuts if they want, but to me it is simply being realistic. The fact of the matter is that a decision has been made: the pension contributions will go up and a bill will be given to the devolved Administrations. The devolved Administrations can then pay that bill whatever way they want. They can continue to subsidise pensions, or else they can ask for additional contributions from the people who will benefit from those pensions.

There is no point in pretending, as the SDLP has done, that the issue can be avoided. Mr Durkan had 10 minutes in which to speak. He said that NILGOSC was different, and I will deal with that issue in a moment or two. He then said that Sinn Féin was simply implementing Tory cuts and that the SDLP would not support Sinn Féin's proposition that people who earn over £32,000 make extra contributions. End of story. He had four minutes left at that point, in which he could have told us what the alternative might be. I watched the clock, but he stopped short at six minutes. He said that the SDLP would not implement the reforms for NILGOSC, for the lower paid in other Departments or for those who earn over £32,000, because to do so would be unfair. However, he did not have a clue about what he wanted to do. That is not responsible politics but cheap political grandstanding.

It is avoiding any responsibility. People have a right to oppose a particular measure if they want, but they should at least give us some ideas about an alternative. There should not be a silence in which no ideas come forward. The amendment proposed by Sinn Féin was all about telling the world how wonderful they are.

3.45 pm

As for the SDLP, we were told that that Alex Attwood did not vote for this; that they did not cross the picket lines; that they supported the strikers, and everything else. Its motion falls into two parts, the first being that NILGOSC should be exempt because it is different. I do not think that the SDLP has quite understood the difference between a NILGOSC scheme and other schemes. They said that it is different because it is a funded scheme. They seem to think that being a funded scheme means that it is fully funded. There is a difference; a scheme can be funded but not necessarily fully funded. Of course, the definition changed when Mr McDonnell said that the scheme was fully funded and could meet 85% of its commitments: 85% does not mean fully funded. I do not care what kind of mathematics you do; I do not care what school you went to — 85% is not fully funded.

There is a current deficit of £800 million in the NILGOSC scheme, and that is bearing in mind the fact that employer contributions will go up by 5% over the next three years. That contribution increase does not come out of thin air; it does not fall from heaven — it comes out of services. At local government level, it means either that people will pay more rates or that council services will be reduced. At central government level, it will mean that education and library boards, schools, the Housing Executive and all other bodies covered by NILGOSC will have to pay more out of the grant that the respective Departments give to those services.

The idea that this is costless is so much nonsense. There is a cost; if we do not take decent contributions from NILGOSC members, the deficit could be funded, I suppose, in a number of ways. First, as the leader of the SDLP suggested, you could gaze into your crystal ball and say that the stock market will rise and that that will cover it. I wish that I had his knowledge of what stock markets are going to do. In fact, I should have a bit of a chat with him, because I think that I can avoid providing any pension fund myself: just have a chat with Alasdair McDonnell, stick your money where he says it should go, and, hey presto, you will be OK — you will fill an £800 million gap. I want only a fraction of that, for goodness' sake, so I would be quite happy to take some advice from him. Otherwise, the money will come from services or increased contributions from taxpayers.

The idea that NILGOSC, being a funded scheme, is exempt from all of the pressures is wrong. It is not fully funded, it has a deficit and it is experiencing increased employer contributions at present. Indeed, we do not know whether those contributions will have to go up in future.

The second argument was that we should follow the example of Scotland. It is very significant that the Scottish Executive did not say that they would not put up the contributions of local government workers. The Scottish Government, in the fanciest piece of footwork — although you would expect nothing else from the Scottish nationalists — have simply passed the buck to the employers and told them to make the decision. I suspect that, once the local council elections are out of the way next year, those councils may adopt a similar position to the Scottish Government. That is significant. Despite all the bluster from the Scottish Government, they said that, with regret, they would have to implement increases for those workers under their control.

The other thing that members of the SDLP suggested is that we should not implement any of that at all. We do not know what their grand plan is. I would be quite happy to give them the opportunity to tell us what they intend to do. Do we fund it ourselves, do we find the £140 million and, for the local government scheme, do the employers find the money that is required to fill the gap, or do we cut services? Those are the options. We cannot bury our heads in the sand.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that cutting services would be likely to mean compulsory redundancies because that is what the savings could result from?

Mr Wilson: Of course, that is the kind of nonsense you have from the Green Party. I will finish up on Sinn Féin's position, which is that we go for only those earning over £32,000, which would mean that the burden would fall —

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

Mr Wilson: — very heavily on a very small proportion of workers —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Wilson: — some 16% in the Civil Service, 12.3% in health and social care and 19% of firefighters.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support amendment No 2. It has been an interesting debate, which has, sadly, developed along predictable lines, with some variations to the normal script about the austerity measures and how Governments will try to fund the economic crisis that we find ourselves in. As Sammy Wilson said, we point very much to the South. The message from the Taoiseach in the South last night was, "you did not cause the crisis, but you are going to pay for it". It is a similar message in London, and just as we do not advocate support for that in the South, we do not advocate it coming from London either.

Our amendment offers an opportunity for the Executive and the Assembly to examine the issue. I do not think that the vote — the Minister outlined the three areas of the vote — actually prevents the Executive examining how the issue is tackled. It actually gives them the freedom and the power to do that. The opposition from the DUP is based on the parity argument. Parity is a very useful shield to hide behind when you do not want to address something, but the reality is that the message from the Westminster Government was that we must take it off pensions, lose £140 million a year over three years, or whatever way we choose to address that.

Rather than losing front line services through that loss to the Budget, the Executive took an approach that allows them to look at pensions and try to decide, with the powers that they have, to find a better way of doing that. All that our proposition asks is for people to explore that. I am not sure what reticence or hostility the Finance Minister has to beginning to explore that within his own remit. You would think that someone who exercises power, albeit limited, in this Assembly would like to do that to the fullest extent to see how they can provide the fairest possible deal, rather than simply saying that that is what they are doing in London, so that is what we have to do here.

I cannot understand the SDLP's opposition to our amendment. I do not think it was fully explained. As was said, Mark Durkan explained what it was opposed to, but did not explain what it is in support of. A proposition of ours, which he said did not go far enough, actually goes substantially further than the original motion. Alasdair McDonnell accused us of muddled thinking and not having our research done, then Pat Ramsey accepted that the SDLP had done no research for the proposition it put forward. If there is some muddled thinking, it is the type of thinking that leads to a party putting out a statement condemning people for crossing picket lines, when one of that party's members, Conall McDevitt, crossed a picket line in London. That is the sort of muddled thinking that we have.

The approach in the Executive was either to lose some of the block grant or to put this motion through and then explore, in a local fashion, as we have local powers, how that could be achieved. It is incumbent on all of us to examine that. In his closing points, Sammy Wilson put figures to us. There are figures that I have seen that dispute the balance between those who are in the highest-paid

bracket and could carry the burden, and those who are in the lowest-paid bracket. Let us examine all the figures. Instead of examining the figures of one Department or one section of the Civil Service, let him, as Minister of Finance and Personnel, bring forward a comprehensive set of figures that support that, and then let us have a debate as to what would be the fairest deal.

There is no parity issue here. Parity is a useful shield; people hold it up and say that we cannot deviate in any sense from what is done in Westminster. However, we breach parity quite regularly. In this instance, it was quite clear that the Westminster Government were saying, "Here is what we are doing. If you do not go along with the general principle, you will lose a certain amount of money out of your block grant, but how you achieve that in your own local set of circumstances is a matter for you." Therefore, let us explore how we achieve that in our own local set of circumstances.

Let us see if we can find a better and fairer deal that protects the lowest paid in the Civil Service. Remember that they have been hit in an awful lot of ways as it is. Some people fell outside the equal pay settlement and did not benefit from it as they should have done; that is an ongoing matter. Let us examine whether we can do this in a better way. Let us not just say, "That is how it is done there; this is how it is done here." There seems to be reluctance on the other side of the House to deviate from anything that is done in Westminster in case it weakens the Union somehow.

There is little point in us having Executive powers here unless we explore ways to get a better deal for the people whom we represent. In the arrangements that have been voted through in the Executive, there is scope for the Executive to look further at how they deal with these matters. As our amendment suggests, I suggest that the Executive show a bit of courage, stand on their own two feet and start to examine a range of options —

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

Mr Murphy: — for how they can achieve a better deal for all workers.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to all the Members who have contributed to the debate. There has been a sense of unrealistic expectation in some quarters about what the Assembly and the Executive can do and even about what our national Government can be expected to do. Some people have accused us of cheerleading for the Conservative Party because we have had an electoral arrangement with them. Listening to some Sinn Féin Members, you would think that the financial crisis that has affected the United Kingdom started 18 months ago. As Lord Hutton said, the pension reforms should have been made years ago.

Those Sinn Féin Members have also forgotten that, as Chancellor, Gordon Brown raided pension funds in the late 1990s, which affected so many people in both the private and public sectors. You cannot have all of those things both ways. You cannot argue that Labour was somehow the great salvation of the UK, when it led us into the financial crisis and has almost bankrupted the United Kingdom. The Labour Party spent and spent and spent, and we are in a deep financial crisis because of that.

We also heard from Sinn Féin about how it would be much better if we looked down South and did things together. In his speech last night, Enda Kenny said that there is a €16 billion difference between what they bring in and what they spend. We have a £9 billion subvention. Therefore, you want to increase it from €16 billion up into the mid-20s. That is crazy, crazy stuff; completely unrealistic politics and economics.

Mr Murphy: It is interesting how the Member points to us as cheerleading for the British Labour Party. It is our colleagues to the left who have a connection with the British Labour Party, just as they have sisterly relations with the party that is now in government in the South. We have never "cheerled" for the British Labour Party or the Dublin Government. In fact, we are the strongest opponents of what the Dublin Government are doing in the Dáil.

Mr McCallister: It might be of benefit to the Member if he did attach to some party, even if it was the Labour Party, because at least that party has an economic policy.

As the Member said, the SDLP has sisterly relations with the British Labour Party and the Irish Labour Party. We also heard from Mrs Cochrane of the Alliance Party. The Lib Dems seem to have moved from being the Alliance Party's sister party to being an embarrassing old aunt that it does not really want to admit that it is connected to in any way, simply because it is now in government. I know that the Alliance Party's Member of Parliament for East Belfast does not sit with the Lib Dems because of the pressures of being in government in very difficult times.

Right throughout the debate, unrealistic points have been made by both the SDLP and Sinn Féin about how we pay those bills and fund those schemes. I took the time to stop and speak to those on strike last week on the picket line. I came in here to work as usual.

4.00 pm

We have to be realistic about how we fund Northern Ireland within the constraints of what we are given in the block grant, how we pay for all the services and the consequences of our actions, as the Minister rightly mentioned. If we move money from one pot to another, there will be consequences. If the Minister does as the motion asks with respect to the NILGOSC scheme, there will be consequences, whether in your rates bill, cuts to services by local government or cuts to the education and library boards.

We are having this debate while Mr Murphy's colleague is writing to the schools to take £100 per pupil from each of them. At the same time, Mr Murphy wants better pensions; he does not want to take money off schools; and he does not want to pay for tuition fees. There are consequences to all those decisions.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that, if the pension issue is not addressed, the Sinn Féin Education Minister may have to write out to take more money off schools?

Mr McCallister: That is a useful intervention. It is exactly the point that I am coming to, and that which the Minister was making. When you move money from one area or protect another, there will be consequences. Members of this House have to face up to the fact that there will be

consequences further down the line. If the NILGOSC scheme has a deficit of £800 million pounds, someone must fill that massive deficit. Someone has to contribute more to the scheme. Many people in the private sector do not have any pension or have only limited pension provision. We need to encourage people in all sectors to pay into a pension scheme, or we will be storing up a major problem for years to come.

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

Mr McCallister: I support the UUP amendment.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank all Members who contributed to the debate, although there were many contributions with which I did not agree.

I draw Members' attention to a key issue in the debate. The vast majority of people who will be targeted by the rise in pension contributions, and, therefore, by a cut in their monthly wage which my colleague Mark Durkan referred to, of about £62 per month, are among the lowest paid workers — predominantly women — who provide services right at the coalface: in classrooms, in the Fire and Rescue Service, as bin men or council workers, and right across our leisure service provision. Many of those people entered into a contract of employment on the understanding, as Mr Nesbitt pointed out in his contribution, of what the pension agreement was to be.

When times were good, no one complained, because often the public sector worker was lower paid than the private sector worker. The public sector workers made that decision for a number of reasons, some of which, I am sure, included greater security of tenure. That is not the case any longer, as we know, because public sector workers are under pressure all the time nowadays. They also made the commitment knowing that they may be paid less today but, in the longer term, their pensions were more secure. This is an attack on those very principles. Those people entered into the contract in good faith, and on the basis of what their pension contributions would be.

Furthermore, I am sure that all our constituency offices are aware of families at the lower-paid end of the scale who fall into the benefits trap. Many people have sometimes to make a decision as to whether it pays them to work. I know that that is a matter of debate, here and at Westminster, in discussions about welfare reform and how to get people back into jobs. Of course, we all know the sad reality of the times we live in.

There are not many jobs to be had, as many of our young people in particular will know, because they are not even getting into training or university, never mind employment. Therefore, people need to bear that in mind. People go out to work, and that £62 cut in their take-home pay could make the difference between whether it is profitable to go to work or whether it would have been better to stay at home and remain on benefits.

Mrs Cochrane remarked that the fat cats at the top end of the private sector are not being targeted by the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition Government. Indeed, on more than one occasion, the trade unions have called on the Government to start drawing in the tax that is due from many of the large corporations. How many billions of pounds have been written off by this Government in income tax that they have

not pursued? It is always easier to run after the low-paid worker and the public sector worker in particular.

We also need to bear in mind that when people voted for the Assembly and the devolved institutions, as many other commentators and contributors have said this afternoon, they did so in the good faith that the Assembly would make a difference and make local decisions count and make the right decisions for the people here. Of all the devolved institutions, we all know that the people in the North rely heavily on the public sector for employment. Unfortunately, when Sinn Féin and the DUP did their negotiations at the point of devolution, the billions of pounds that they said they would get from the Government failed to materialise. Therefore, there is little comfort for those who went out on strike on Wednesday in respect of how the devolved Administration is delivering for them.

We have heard scurrilous remarks that one of our party members crossed a picket line, but that is not so. Mr McDevitt attended a meeting, with the blessing of the trade unions, to put the issue to the Labour Party and others, alongside Westminster MPs, so you should check your facts. *[Interruption.]* However, one indisputable fact is that on 22 September, Sinn Féin voted with the DUP, the Ulster Unionists and the Alliance Party to implement the cuts and the rise to pension contributions to NILGOSC workers. However, we will not be churlish; we welcome the fact that Sinn Féin has now joined us on this particular point. In its amendment, Sinn Féin tried to put forward proposals looking at a cut-off point at which other public sector workers would not face a rise in their pension contributions. As other Members said, that needs further working out and further detail, and I hope that others will allow those discussions to take place at the Executive, and I wish them well in that task.

The Finance Minister, as is his normal performance, blusters about, accusing and pointing the finger at everyone else, but he seldom comes up with any solutions in relation to the budget. Mark Durkan and Alasdair McDonnell referred to the document that our party produced in relation to ideas to save money and better investment, yet the DUP and Sinn Féin refuse to acknowledge it. *[Interruption.]* If some Members wish to speak, I am happy to let them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. At all times, I encourage the cut and thrust of politics, but when five conversations are going on at one time, the Member is right to complain. I ask Members to make their remarks through the Chair. Please continue, Mrs Kelly.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Agnew: Does the Member agree that the Finance Minister could overturn the policy that his party put in place, which sees people who live in houses worth less than £400,000 subsidising the rates of those who live in million-pound mansions, due to the cap on rates?

Mrs D Kelly: Others can look forward to that suggestion from the Green Party; perhaps it will help the Finance Minister in his considerations. The Finance Minister also said that our party colleague the Minister of the Environment, Alex Attwood, was grandstanding; however, I suggest that Mr Wilson has much to learn from the Scottish Finance Minister, John Swinney.

It is he who exhorted that a London decision should not be imported on to the equivalent local government pension scheme in Scotland. If others took lessons on how to stand up to the British Government, not only might our public sector workers be in a better position today, but so might workers right across our public services.

Some Members referred to North/South co-operation and criticised the Irish Republic, its economy and the difficulties that it faces. It does not face those difficulties on its own, I hasten to add; there is a recession across Europe and globally. One might ask why, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is because of reckless decisions that were made by the banks and the banking institutions. Let us not forget where this came from. It was not the public sector workers who created the crisis, but it will certainly be them and the end service-user who will have to pay.

One other point that I want to make is that if the unionist parties, in particular, could recognise the benefits of greater North/South co-operation on a wide range of fronts, we could save a lot of money. There would be greater efficiency, effectiveness and better service delivery. That is one of the spirits and institutions of the Good Friday Agreement that the DUP has failed to grasp.

I note that while Sinn Féin tries to extol itself as some radical leftist party in the South, it is very much a Tory implementer in the North. There is certainly partition within that party as to where it lies.

The SDLP is proud to be associated with the Party of European Socialists across Europe. We have no difficulty in standing up for social justice and a better deal for those who are trying to do a day's work for a proper day's pay and who have signed up to terms and conditions.

People would do well to remember that the British maxim of divide and conquer is still very much prevailing today. That is what the proposals to increase pension contributions and to cut public sector pay are about. The DUP talks in disparaging terms about strikers, and the Ulster Unionists have not much to talk about either in that respect. If one looks back in history to when the North was brought to its knees, one will see that at the institutions and deal that were on the table in the early 1970s, and which prevail today, would have gone ahead if it had not been for the strikes and the way in which the whole of the North was paid to stand still, alongside an increase in the IRA violence campaign.

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

Mrs D Kelly: I do not think any of us need lectures on history. We on this side of the House certainly do not need lectures. I urge Members to support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording of the original motion will have been changed to such an extent that it would not be in order for the House to vote on amendment No 2 as well.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 55; Noes 28

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beggs and Mr Cree.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr McGlone.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members that amendment No 2 will not now be put to the House.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 54; Noes 28

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Nesbitt and Mr Spratt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Byrne and Mr McDevitt.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the fundamental changes to public sector pension provision across the United Kingdom; expresses disappointment that a resolution could not be found and that strike action was deemed necessary by trade unions; and calls on the trade unions and the UK Government to continue negotiations with a view to finding a solution and preventing further strike action in the future on this matter.

Adjourned at 4.38 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 6 December 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Steven Agnew has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. I remind the House that a Member presenting a petition may refer only to the parties from whom the petition comes, the number of signatures on it and say briefly what it is about. That should take no longer than three minutes. I call Mr Steven Agnew to present the petition.

Mr Agnew: I have a petition that has been signed by almost 2,800 people. Fracking — the hydraulic fracturing of rock — is a method used to extract natural gas from the ground. The process involves pumping millions of gallons of water mixed with toxic chemicals thousands of feet deep into the ground. It has been used in the USA and Australia, where it has caused widespread environmental damage and water pollution, including the death of livestock and wildlife. Serious health issues for people who live in those areas have also been reported. Because of that damning body of evidence, which includes academic reports, moratoria on fracking have been put in place in New York state, New Jersey, North Rhine, parts of South Africa and France.

A large area of Northern Ireland will be affected by fracking. A licence to frack has been issued for County Fermanagh. The people of Northern Ireland need a full review of that decision and a ban on the process, which could impact severely on the tourism industry, agriculture, water quality, the environment and health. The petition's signatories call on the Northern Ireland Assembly to place an immediate permanent ban on the process known as hydraulic fracturing and all related preparatory and exploratory work in Northern Ireland.

It is important to note that it is not a Green Party petition, but one that has been set up by Dawn Bourke, a Fermanagh native who now lives in the US and has seen the devastation that fracking can cause to human health and the natural environment. Although the petition has been signed by members of a number of political parties, the vast majority have no political allegiance. Instead, they have concern for the people of Northern Ireland, its natural environment and its agriculture and tourism industries, particularly in Fermanagh. A warning has come from across the Atlantic Ocean: we should heed it.

Mr Agnew moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and send a copy to the Chairman of the Committee.

Ministerial Statements

Connected Health

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to inform the House of the exciting opportunities that are presenting themselves in the area of Connected Health. The significance of these opportunities was reflected by the Executive in their recently published draft Programme for Government and in the Northern Ireland economic strategy.

Connected Health is a term used to describe a model for healthcare delivery that uses technology to provide healthcare remotely and allows patients more freedom to lead their own life. It aims to optimise the use of healthcare resources and to provide increased and flexible opportunities for patients to engage with clinicians and to better self-manage their care. Connected Health encompasses telehealth and remote care options such as home care, and disease and lifestyle management. It can help to manage chronic diseases such as congestive heart failure, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes. It should also lead to reduced unplanned admissions to hospital and to improved outcomes for patients and their families. Those are potentially significant benefits for the health and social care system in Northern Ireland.

Although my primary focus is on ensuring that Connected Health helps to develop different and more effective health interventions for patients, I am acutely aware that anything that we do in that field can also have a direct and positive impact in helping to grow the Northern Ireland economy through the attraction of inward investment and the development of indigenous companies in the technology and life sciences sectors. In turn, that economic growth has the potential to positively impact on the health of the population. It is for those reasons that my ministerial colleague Arlene Foster and I have chosen to make statements to the House on the real opportunities that we see in pursuing jointly the exciting agenda for developing health and prosperity.

Members will be aware that I visited Boston in October. The purpose of that visit was to hear at first hand about the opportunities that Connected Health could provide for our health and social care system and for our economy. I attended a series of meetings during the week that I spent in Boston which provided the opportunity to establish new contacts with the US Department of Commerce and

to strengthen our relationships with the President of the Massachusetts Senate. I also met business leaders, academics and researchers and visited exciting new companies with innovative ideas.

Members do not need to be reminded of the major challenges that the population here faces in healthcare delivery and that face our economy more widely. That is particularly the case at this time. We have an ageing population, which will mean more chronic conditions that require long-term management. Lifestyle choices also mean that conditions related to obesity and the binge-drinking culture will increase the challenge to our system. That is all in the context of an increasingly difficult financial position.

In order to provide high quality and safe care to patients in the current financial context, we must look at new and innovative ways of providing health and social care services in the best way that we can and with the resources that we have. Simply doing things as we always done them is not an option. I believe firmly that, by using technology in the right way and on the right solutions, we can help to empower patients and carers to become involved in the overall management of their condition in a safe and supervised way. Increased monitoring through self-management has the potential to support the earlier recognition of problems, which will allow interventions to be made before patients reach the stage of needing emergency or inpatient care. As I said, those are potentially significant benefits.

Of course, minimising hospital inpatient stays has the obvious advantage of saving money, but, more importantly, it has massive benefits for individuals. It will allow those with chronic illnesses to remain in their own home with their family, rather than staying in hospital simply to have their condition monitored. It can also avoid stays in hospital when a lack of effective monitoring had led to a flare-up of their condition in the first place.

If we grasp the opportunities that are open to us, many of those benefits could be realised by using existing technology in new ways. However, we also need to recognise the importance of innovation. Not all new ideas will end up being winners, and some good ideas will not be economically viable. It is only through co-operation between business, academia and clinicians that we can best ensure that opportunities are exploited so that future winners can be identified and developed and so that patients are the real winners. That is something in which we have an important part to play, and we must play that part.

With a population of around 1.8 million people and an integrated health and social care sector, we are ideally placed to help develop and test new ideas for improving patient care, not just here but more widely and potentially globally. My colleague will say more about those opportunities shortly. Northern Ireland has a long and proud history of being at the forefront of medical innovation. Frank Pantridge from Hillsborough and John Anderson developed the mobile defibrillator, which is an innovation that is used worldwide. A Northern Ireland neurosurgeon, Derek Gordon, developed a titanium plate for brain injuries, and a side effect of our recent past is that, for many years, we led the way in the treatment of trauma. That is a tradition that I know we all want to continue, and it is in that context that the economy Minister and I want to see greater integration between health and economic development.

There can be benefits for patients in the types of care that they can receive and benefits for the economy where such developments contribute to economic growth and prosperity. The economy Minister and I agree on the mutual benefits; later today, we will jointly sign a memorandum of understanding between my Department and Invest NI.

The purpose of the memorandum of understanding is to provide a basis through which my Department and the health and social care sector, working in collaboration with Invest NI, can build on its role by supporting clinical research and development. That will provide a basis through which we can support Invest NI to promote Northern Ireland as a pro-business region in the health and life sciences sector. That is not something that we can take forward just in Northern Ireland. Innovation in technology for health is taking place all around the world, and we can contribute to and benefit from international collaboration. The Northern Ireland Massachusetts Connection (NIMAC), which now includes Finland and Catalonia as members, is an important force in strengthening business and research collaboration between member regions. I welcome the representatives from Finland who have joined us in the Public Gallery, along with European MHealth Alliance representatives from Manchester.

The research links that have been established between North America and Europe are key to developing new and innovative products and services that will transform healthcare delivery, particularly in chronic disease management and prevention. When I was in Boston I met significant organisations in the healthcare field and a number of exciting new companies, several of which have already made follow-up visits to Northern Ireland as an initial step to exploring potential opportunities to develop and try out new products. Given the importance of the worldwide Connected Health infrastructure I am delighted to support the planned establishment of the European Connected Health Alliance. My ministerial colleague will say more about that organisation in her statement, but I want to signal my support for it. My wish is that my Department will be actively involved.

Remote telemonitoring is an important aspect of Connected Health. It is a way to improve the lives of those with long-term conditions through remote monitoring of their conditions. We have been actively pursuing developments in that area, and I can report some very positive progress, including the introduction of a new £18 million remote patient monitoring project. It is intended that it will benefit 20,000 patients over the six-year life of the contract. The contract for the project was awarded to TF3, a consortium of three companies: Tunstall Healthcare, Fold Housing Association and S3, who came together specifically to meet the requirements of the initiative. They now form the largest provider of telecare and telehealth systems in the UK, and it is here in Northern Ireland. The project will allow us to provide more and better targeted support to patients, enabling them to have greater control, learn more about their condition and live a more independent life. It will also bring timely information to professionals, enabling improvements in the quality of care, reductions in inpatient admissions and optimal use of staff resources.

10.45 am

I want to do more to ensure that health and social care in Northern Ireland fully embraces the opportunities that new Connected Health technologies offer to improving health and well-being, patient care and the modernisation of service delivery. To lead that work, I want to refocus and re-energise the work of the European Centre for Connected Health (ECCH) in the health and social care sector here in line with the wider developments on Connected Health and to build on its success in bringing forward the remote telemonitoring project. The experience of the European Centre for Connected Health in that work means that it is well placed to contribute to modernising the Northern Ireland health and social care system by further redeveloping national and international links to identify and test the application of Connected Health and care technologies, encourage innovation in the application of technology and support and inform research and economic development opportunities. In recognition of the creation of the alliance and the need to establish the important role of the European Centre for Connected Health, it will henceforth be identified as reflecting its continuing remit and responsibilities in the HSC sector.

In concluding, I reiterate my firm belief that Connected Health offers great opportunities, first and foremost, to improve patient care but also to reduce unnecessary costs on our system. It is consistent with the need to reduce unnecessary admissions to hospital and with policy direction on managing long-term conditions, and the provision of technology will improve services and help people to take greater responsibility for self-management. That is why I felt it important to report to the Assembly on my recent visit to Boston and why my ministerial colleague and I believe that it is necessary to work together to realise the opportunities for health and prosperity for the future. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We now have questions to the Minister. Members should remember that it is questions.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. As someone who has worked in the health service for many years, I truly understand the benefits of assistive technology, which we have had for a long time. This takes that one step further and will definitely ensure that the patient has empowerment and can self-manage. Will the Minister elaborate on what benefits the memorandum of understanding will bring to the delivery of health and social care?

Mr Poots: We perceive the memorandum of understanding to be absolutely necessary, and it will enable the Department and Invest NI to develop opportunities that can lead to improved health and well-being of patients and can develop the economy. In Northern Ireland, we are in a unique situation in that we have an integrated health and social care system. It is considerably better than the systems in the rest of the UK and in the United States of America. That makes us an attractive option for the business sector, Connected Health and the life and health sciences sector to test their technology. So, our patients can directly benefit from this. Equally, the memorandum of understanding sends out a very strong and positive signal to local indigenous companies and those that are considering establishing a base in Northern Ireland that there is a strong joint ministerial commitment to developing opportunities in this area.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, and I welcome it very much, particularly as people are living longer and want to live an independent life in their own home. Have there been any discussions to date with local indigenous companies and are they well geared-up for participating in taking this forward?

Mr Poots: Yes, there have been considerable discussions with local indigenous companies, and, indeed, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I will continue those discussions later this afternoon with an indigenous company.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his statement. The use of new technologies should lead to savings in healthcare and a more efficient and less labour-intensive way of operating. Telemonitoring, which links the patient directly with the doctor over the internet, is a good example of that. How will the Minister link that new development with his new primary care centres? Will it enable access to specialist advice at an early stage of diagnosis and treatment?

Mr Poots: One of the major benefits of telemonitoring is that it will allow people who have chronic illnesses to better self-manage. It will allow the qualitative information to be made available to those who oversee their healthcare. The fact that qualitative information can be relayed easily to their GP or to the primary care service provider who manages that individual's condition will be of huge benefit and will ensure that many people who have a chronic condition will avoid hospital admissions as a consequence. The benefit of avoiding hospital admissions is that the patient will probably have a much quicker recovery time after their condition has deteriorated because it will have been responded to more quickly. Another benefit is that the smaller the number of hospital admissions, the more we can invest in providing care in the acute sector rather than managing chronic illness.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's statement. We recognise the role of technology in healthcare. We should not only embrace that technology but strive constantly to improve it, and such initiatives can only help to do so. Indeed, any initiative that might improve the health of our economy as well as the health of our people is to be especially welcomed. Can the Minister elaborate on the outworkings of the new £18 million remote monitoring project? Will it be available across all trust areas?

Mr Poots: At this stage, four of the five trusts are making it available. The Belfast Trust has some work to complete, but I trust that it will be available throughout Northern Ireland during the next year. It is a six-year contract and will be rolled out to 20,000 people across Northern Ireland. It will be particularly beneficial for managing the conditions of people who live in rural areas, where they are further away from healthcare centres. I named a number of conditions at which this will be specifically targeted, and all those conditions are proven to be hugely costly to the healthcare system. In Northern Ireland, we spend 80% of our money on 20% of the people, so it is incumbent on us to look at how we can do things better. It is important not only that we manage our finances well but that we manage things better from the patients' perspective. Having a better system of care whereby we can manage chronic conditions better will

ensure that patients have better outcomes. That must be our primary objective.

Mr McCarthy: As other Members have done, I welcome the Minister's statement, and I welcome his support for the planned establishment of a European Connected Health Alliance. Anything with the word "alliance" tagged on to it has to be successful and positive. Is there any potential for the development of electronically based pathology for Northern Ireland in what his statement has contained?

Mr Poots: At this stage, this is about looking after the living as opposed to the dead, and that is what we are attempting to do. Nonetheless, I am sure that the issue of pathology could be addressed at another point. The European Connected Health Alliance, which the Member may be particularly interested in, is a single organisation providing a single voice in Europe. I trust that it will be more successful than the single currency, mind you. It provides a partnership between end users, research organisations, educational institutes, companies, funding organisations and government bodies. Furthermore, the alliance supports the public and private sectors by working together to develop the connected health markets. Given its position and role, there are many benefits to my Department in becoming a member, particularly as it will provide a focus and promote the economic development of the connected health sector. Through that, we will be in a stronger position to ensure that the industry can identify the health needs of the Northern Ireland population and, equally, in a much stronger position to secure funding from Europe to further our research and development and innovation agendas. Let us put Northern Ireland in the lead in Europe.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. What proof is there that Connected Health will be effective for patients, and how will it fit in with the pending Compton review?

Mr Poots: The review is identifying that we need to bring more care to the primary care sector. We will move away from having people going into hospital and will provide that care in the primary and community sectors. Therefore, it is important that we seek to ensure that we can provide as many services as possible to people locally in their own home. The Connected Health agenda will allow us to do that.

The evidence base exists. Studies in the UK and internationally report that telemonitoring improves quality of life. They identified that it reduces hospital admissions and, importantly, mortality. It empowers patients and alters their attitudes towards their conditions. The ECCH commissioned an independent evaluation of Connected Health pilots across Northern Ireland. Locally, the study found that patients were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits they derive from remote telemonitoring. It has a positive impact on their quality of life and general health and well-being. A majority of clinicians also felt that remote telemonitoring helped their patients to feel less anxious, more reassured and better able to manage their illness. A large majority of patients felt that it helped them to reduce their reliance on hospital and nursing staff and reduce their hospital admissions.

There will be negativity. I have no doubt that we will have someone brought out by the media to complain and say that this is the wrong thing to do. However, I am convinced that it is the right thing to do and that if we proceed with it there will be beneficial outcomes.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Is the Minister confident that the technological infrastructure will be in place to allow that process to roll out? He mentioned people in more remote rural areas, but there are people in those areas who do not have access to broadband.

Mr Poots: We have been trialling it, and the roll-out will commence this week, so that is how confident we are. It will be more 3G-based than relying on broadband, so we believe that the technology is sufficiently capable to deliver it across Northern Ireland.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for his statement on Connected Health issues. I welcome the use of technology. Anything that improves our health service is good news. Will the Minister outline the potential for Connected Health in the future?

Mr Poots: We need to grasp the opportunities. At meetings thus far, companies have indicated to us that they believe that there is huge potential in this and that they want to work with us in Northern Ireland in delivering Connected Health. I named a number of illnesses that we could support at this point. The potential is to extend monitoring beyond that list of illnesses and into a series of other areas.

Telemonitoring and telehealth also give people the opportunity to have reviews with their consultants without leaving their home. Care can be provided from hospitals to people's homes without them leaving their home. Those opportunities need to be assessed and taken forward. Obviously, it would not be suitable for every person not to have to go to see a consultant, but in many cases the consultant does not need to examine someone physically. So, telehealth monitoring and having all the appropriate data and so forth will enable consultants to provide that level of care without seeing the patients.

11.00 am

Ms Ritchie: There is irrefutable evidence that science and technology can make an ongoing improvement to individuals' health and well-being. Also, the research available as a result can improve and shorten the time it takes to provide good diagnoses for individuals and communities. Will the Minister specify what work has been done in a European context to explore the opportunities that could be available under framework 7 and its successor, Horizon 2020?

Mr Poots: That question would probably be more appropriately dealt with by Minister Foster. Nonetheless, we have been engaging very closely with Europe on all of these issues. This is an area that will enable us to bring new streams of European funding to Northern Ireland, not because of a bleeding heart sentiment that Northern Ireland is a poor wee country that needs an awful lot of help from Europe but because we can provide leadership in Europe and demonstrate that there are real benefits and advantages for the rest of Europe from making an investment in the research and piloting that will take place in Northern Ireland. That can then flow through the rest of Europe and provide significant benefits and advantages to people, not just in Northern Ireland but across the continent of Europe.

Mr Campbell: In the early part of his statement, the Minister mentioned COPD, from which many thousands of people in

Northern Ireland suffer. The Minister will be aware that there are many third-sector groups that help and assist sufferers of COPD in a very cost-effective way. Will he ensure that, on the Connected Health issue, those groups will be fully consulted and will be able to continue offering cost-effective help?

Mr Poots: I have met people who specialise in COPD and look at how we can better manage the condition, how we can drive down the number of people who contract COPD and how we can improve the care and management of that condition. Of course, we will always want to work with people who can provide added value to the health and social care system. That is something that we will never shirk or shy away from.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I am sure that he would agree that technology should not replace the human face of health and social care and that a check-up with a doctor or practice nurse gives a patient the chance to talk about their worries and be reassured. Will he elaborate on the fact that providing effective treatment is not just about using machines to monitor physical symptoms? There needs to be a more holistic approach, where the whole person is treated.

Mr Poots: This has not been set up to replace the human side of healthcare; it has been set up to enhance it and to provide those people who are involved in the provision of healthcare with the qualitative information that will enable better decision-making and earlier interventions. That will lead to fewer hospital admissions, because the early intervention provides the remedy to the illness. All of those things are to our advantage.

I hear what the Member said. We do not want to use this as a tool for displacing the human side of healthcare. The human side is a very important element, but the technology is an important tool for each and every one of those humans who provide healthcare in the system. The technology is purely a supplement to the work of the professionals at this stage.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. How many patients across Northern Ireland does he expect to benefit from this type of innovative approach, and what are the potential savings to the health service?

Mr Poots: At this stage, we are looking at around 20,000 patients. The cost to introduce this model in the first instance is around £20 million, and we consider that the savings generated will exceed that considerably. At this stage, there are views that it could save closer to £40 million, but this is not purely about saving money; it is about providing a different form of healthcare that will improve the outcomes for patients. The fact that a £20 million investment in this could potentially save just short of £40 million is a positive thing and is worth looking at in its own right.

The fact that we will ensure that many people can manage their condition at home — as opposed to ending up going to hospital, having people come and visit them in hospital to provide that support and risking other infections as a result of coming into contact with others with different kinds of illnesses — will be to the benefit of the individual. We need to modernise the way our health and social care system provides care to people with long-term conditions, and we believe that remote telemonitoring will make an important contribution to our modernisation programme.

Health and the Economy: Memorandum of Understanding

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to add to the earlier statement made by my colleague Edwin Poots and to update the House on the exciting economic opportunities presented in the area of Connected Health.

My Department has been working closely with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to deliver economic and health benefits through collaboration. There has been a focus on Connected Health, which is a means of delivering healthcare remotely, with a particular focus on dealing with chronic disease management. This is an area of significance to healthcare and private sector organisations worldwide, given the spiralling costs of managing chronic disease, the poor outcomes and the significant investment being made by the private sector to address the issue.

The partnership between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), Invest Northern Ireland (INI) and DHSSPS will be formalised in a memorandum of understanding, which I will launch with Edwin Poots this afternoon. The memorandum will look at a number of strategic areas including targeted research and development; innovation funding; promoting the Connected Health agenda; and collaborating with Europe and North America. It is proposed that, through this memorandum, we will deliver some of the key health and social care benefits that the Department of Health needs and, through effective international collaboration, we will also make an important contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland.

Members will be aware that the Executive are making a significant commitment to the economy through their second Programme for Government, which has set targets of 25,000 new jobs and £300 million in foreign direct investment (FDI). Connected Health has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to those targets from local and external sources. The kinds of jobs that we expect to create through Connected Health include those in research and development, software, support services and shared services. We think it reasonable to expect to create up to 400 jobs in those areas over the next Programme for Government period.

Our research groups at Queen's University and the University of Ulster provide us with an excellent base to attract investment and, through effective collaboration, to export new ideas internationally. We benefit from excellent international linkages in North America and Europe, facilitated by groups such as NIMAC (Northern Ireland Massachusetts Connection), which now includes Finland and the Catalan region of Spain. As my colleague Edwin Poots mentioned, he met with representatives of those groups during a recent visit to Boston.

In addition to our research base, we also benefit from a world-class knowledge-based workforce, which has attracted significant international investment from companies such as the New York Stock Exchange, Citi, Bombardier and Caterpillar to name a few. Our home-grown companies, such as Almac, Norbrook, Randox, First Derivatives and Andor Technology, equally have been a source of significant investment. We will

build on that knowledge infrastructure, complemented by healthcare teams from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the health and social care trusts, to provide a one-stop shop for companies seeking partnerships to bring new products and services to market, particularly with an eye on the UK and European markets.

Our links to the Connected Health infrastructure across the world are also vital, and that is why I am delighted to welcome the recently announced alliance between the European MHealth Alliance (EuMHA) and the European Connected Health Campus, which have come together to form the European Connected Health Alliance. Invest Northern Ireland and DHSSPS will be playing their part in working with the new organisation, and we look forward to the strengthening of relationships and co-operation across Europe that should result.

Any employment that we can build linked to Connected Health will make an important contribution, particularly in these challenging economic times. The business and research collaboration links being fostered through our participation in NIMAC and the new European Connected Health Alliance will make a significant difference to a number of local companies attempting to export for the first time. Those sorts of linkages have already benefitted a local University of Ulster spin-out company, Intelesens, which has just completed a successful research collaboration project with Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. The resulting product has now been cleared by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for sale in the United States.

In conclusion, I echo the comments made earlier by my colleague Edwin Poots that Connected Health offers great opportunities for the health sector. It also offers significant opportunities for the economy of Northern Ireland. Those will be achieved through a partnership between our two Departments, combined with a focus on international collaboration, to stimulate investment from local and international sources. In the current economic climate, that will give a welcome boost to the Northern Ireland economy and make an important contribution to the future Programme for Government. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr McKay (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement, which is to be welcomed. I particularly welcome the reference to research and development. It is quite clear that, as a local economy, we have not been doing enough on R&D, and it must become central to our economic growth. You referred to two projections for Connected Health: that it will create 400 jobs over the next three years; and that it will make a contribution to the Programme for Government's FDI target of £300 million. Will the Minister elaborate on that and on whether there are jobs or concrete proposals already in the pipeline?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Deputy Chairperson for his question and for his welcome of what is a very innovative approach. It is telling that the Prime Minister referred to the sector yesterday when he announced what he was doing with the life sciences, including the monitoring of three million patients remotely. We in Northern Ireland can be very proud of the fact that we have passed the test stage and are now

dealing with 20,000 patients. We are not in pilot mode; we are in implementation mode.

That also applies to the jobs that the Member asked about. At present, Invest Northern Ireland estimates that we have 4,200 people employed in the sector, and the 400 jobs represent a 10% increase in that. I actually think that that is quite a conservative estimate, because, although those are direct jobs, there will obviously be supply-chain jobs as well, so the figure may be higher than that, and I certainly hope that it will be.

On our foreign direct investment target of £300 million, now that we have implemented the project, I think that companies from right across the world that are interested in the sector will see us as moving forward and will therefore be interested in investing in Northern Ireland. We want to speak to those companies and encourage them to invest, because we are ahead of the game, and we should rightly shout about it and make sure that everybody knows that we are ahead of the game.

Mr Newton: I also congratulate the two Ministers for the joined-upness of approach to what I think is an important area of research and development, and I know that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment also thinks that. Minister, you mentioned 400 jobs that may become available through Connected Health. Will you expand on what type of jobs they might be? You also mentioned a University of Ulster spin-out company. Are you hopeful that other spin-out companies will come from this initiative?

11.15 am

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As regards the sort of jobs that we are targeting, I thank the MATRIX team for its work on what areas we should look to as an economy. One of the areas that the MATRIX group recommended is the Connected Health agenda. It believes that we can push ahead in that sector, and that is exactly what my colleague and I intend to do. I imagine that the jobs that we will be looking at initially are research and development jobs and jobs in the software sector and in support services. I accept that those are very high-end jobs. However, when it comes to the delivery of telecare and telehealth, domiciliary care workers will be trained up to use the new technology. Therefore, jobs will be created right across the economy. It is a very important sector in which we should push ahead.

The spin-out company, Intelesens, has been a marvellous success. I hope that there are other academics in the college system. As Minister Poots said, we hope to meet not only those from the telecare and telehealth industry today but the universities to push ahead in the sector. We believe that there are huge opportunities for health. As you will know, there are also huge opportunities for the economy. We will be able to act as an exemplar for the world in this sector. It really is a very exciting day when we can push ahead with what the Member called "joined-upness". We will not operate in our silos anymore but across government, which I very much welcome.

Mr Nesbitt: I also welcome the initiative, in particular the joined-up government that Mr Newton referred to. My party is keen to both promote and endorse that strategy. What potential does the Minister see for leveraging EU framework programme 7 (FP7) and/or Horizon 2020 funding for the

sort of targeted research and development and innovation funding that she referenced in her statement?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. It is a very relevant question that has been to the forefront of our minds and, indeed, my mind well before Minister Poots became the Minister. I have met European officials, because this is one of the sectors that they want to become involved with. We recently had a meeting with the director of information society and media, Paul Timmers. He is very much focused on dealing with the social challenge.

We are in a very unique situation insofar as we have not only the National Health Service but social services integrated into that health service. As the Health Minister indicated, that is unique to Northern Ireland. Therefore we can meet a lot of the social challenges that are before us and, indeed, happen before they enter primary care.

There are huge opportunities for us to draw down extra funding that may enhance not only the health budget but, from my perspective, the research and development budget. Even though we had good figures this year, we are still behind the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, we want to see more business spend on research and development. We will look very keenly to see how we can draw down funds from not only FP7 but, as the Member rightly said, Horizon 2020 to ensure that we get the most benefit out of those two European programmes.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her statement. It is one of the most progressive statements that I have heard since I returned to the Assembly. I also very much welcome the answer that she gave to Mike Nesbitt. Further to that answer, can the Minister give the House an assurance that there will be a dedicated team of client executives in Invest Northern Ireland who can help to co-ordinate access to these European research and development moneys and act as liaison officers with both the universities, who have to do the practical scientific research, and companies such as Almac and Randox? That is crucially important.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. We will focus on the European aspect, not least because some of the countries that are interested in what is going on in Northern Ireland are very much part of the European continent. We want to point out to them what we are doing in Northern Ireland. Part of the memorandum of understanding that Minister Poots and I will sign at lunchtime sets up a project team that will comprise the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland and the permanent secretary of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who will lead the project team, and, under them, dedicated people who will work on the agenda. That is why it is so important to have the memorandum of understanding signed today. We will give it a new focus and impetus, and we will drive it forward for the Northern Ireland economy. It is a very important announcement. I thank the Member for his comments, but I hope that those outside the Chamber recognise that moving on in this manner is a ground-breaking achievement.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. I very much welcome what appears to be the start of joined-up working between two Departments, DETI and Health. It is very encouraging.

As has already been said, Northern Ireland has been to the forefront in innovative and successful ideas. Is the Minister confident — and this question is an excuse for her to promote what she is going to say — that the challenge will be met by and within Northern Ireland, considering the competition that there will be from the UK, Europe, and even America?

Mrs Foster: Yes. Our indigenous companies are very much up to the challenge. I cited the example of Intelesens, one of our spin-out companies, as being in collaboration with the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. That indicates the sort of research and development that is happening in Northern Ireland. Often, Members are unaware of the research, development and innovation that goes on around Northern Ireland. However, the global industry is aware of it and looks keenly at us to see what is happening. That is why it is incumbent on Minister Poots and me to push ahead with this agenda: because there are so many exciting things happening in industries across Northern Ireland. It is incumbent on us as Government Ministers to drive this forward and give those things the spotlight so that they can grow even more.

Mr Moutray: Like other Members, I welcome the statements by both Ministers, which are very positive. In relation to the Prime Minister's announcement that £3 million of funding is being made available for remote monitoring, can the Minister tell us what exactly the potential is for local health-related businesses, not least Almac Group Limited in my Upper Bann constituency.

Mrs Foster: I love the way the Member manages to get his constituency into a question about telehealth. Obviously, Almac — just to recognise it — does marvellous things in Craigavon, and not just there. It is now a global company and is based in the USA as well. We pay tribute to all our indigenous pharmaceutical and telehealth companies that are leading the way in their sectors.

We were just made aware today of yesterday's announcement by the Prime Minister that he has an aspiration that three million patients across the United Kingdom will be monitored remotely. However, the exciting thing for Northern Ireland, as the Minister of Health has indicated, is that we are already implementing that for 20,000 patients across four Northern Ireland trusts. The scheme has already started. So, we are leading the United Kingdom, if I may say so, in telehealth and telecare and we very much hope to share our experiences of what happens. The Prime Minister also announced what he intends to do with NHS clinical trials. The important thing for us is that we are leading the way in this matter and we want to keep the momentum going: that is what today is about.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas le ráiteas an Aire. Like other Members, I welcome the Minister's statement. It is good that there is cross-party support for what she is doing. I recognise and congratulate the Minister on her commitment to the sector since she launched a similar initiative, during the previous mandate, in Enniskillen with representatives of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the former US economic envoy and a local company.

How will continuing gaps in decent and affordable broadband provision in rural areas impact on the development of this

technology? What actions will her Department take to improve broadband provision to vulnerable rural dwellers who may well be interested in taking up this technology?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. We have been in discussion with our counterparts in Whitehall in relation to recent announcements on broadband funding, not least in the Chancellor's autumn statement. I hope to come to the House in the not-too-distant future and make further announcements on how we, as a Government, can help the industry in relation to broadband. However, the Member will know that I have often said that it is not just about broadband infrastructure; it is also about mobile phone coverage, because a lot of people use mobile devices now, and a lot of telecare and telehealth may be carried out through mobile devices. Therefore, it is hugely important that we continue to press in relation to our 3G coverage in Northern Ireland.

Just yesterday, I had a meeting with Jonathan Rose from Ofcom about that very issue and, again, raised the difficulties in relation to our mobile phone coverage in the rural west. Therefore, it is a live issue in the Department. I have no doubt that the Member will keep pressing me on it, and I will come back to the House again about it in the near future.

Mr Dunne: What international benefits are there for Connected Health, and how are we working with other countries throughout the world?

Mrs Foster: That is the very good news story. There are a lot of good news stories connected with this issue today, but the fact that the international community is looking to Northern Ireland as an exemplar in this sector is very exciting. As I said, we have connections in Massachusetts, Finland and the Catalan region of Spain. Therefore, we are building connections all the time, which gives us strength in relation to research and development and in the collaborative nature of working through Europe. It also gives us opportunities in relation to new foreign direct investment.

As the Member will know, there is a challenging target in the new Programme for Government to bring about £300 million of foreign direct investment, and I believe that Connected Health will play its role in relation to that target.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister on her statement.

Private Members' Business

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The next item of business on the Order Paper is the motion on hydraulic fracturing. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Lo: I beg to move

That this Assembly believes that a moratorium should be placed on the onshore and offshore exploration, development and production of shale gas by withdrawing licences for hydraulic fracturing (fracking), at least until the publication of a detailed environmental impact assessment into the practice; notes that hydraulic fracturing can put local water sources at risk of contamination; further notes that, amongst a variety of adverse environmental impacts, the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts, which put both workers and local communities at risk; considers that the production of hard-to-reach fossil fuels is not compatible with efforts to achieve carbon reduction targets; and urges the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give greater support to the generation of energy from renewable sources instead.

I welcome the opportunity to move the motion and urge Members to embrace our responsibility as public servants to protect our society and environment from the uncertain impact of a process that has a severe deficiency of research.

I extend my sincere thanks to all members of the public who have written to me about the issue. The response has been overwhelming. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has granted a total of four petroleum licences covering the Lough Neagh basin, Lough Allen basin, Rathlin basin and Rathlin Island.

The motion is not an attempt at scaremongering, as some have suggested. Hydraulic fracturing, which is more commonly known as fracking, has been either banned or placed under a moratorium in France, areas of Germany, Australia, South Africa and in several states in the USA. Now, with the potential for fracking in our own back garden, we need to be extremely cautious about how we progress with this type of energy extraction. I believe that it would be irresponsible not to place a moratorium on fracking, especially in light of the gaps in research abroad, and, more importantly, the lack of research relating to our own specific case. This is not a call for a moratorium only, but for a comprehensive detailed environmental impact assessment.

11.30 am

The concerns regarding fracking are wide-ranging, and, first, I will focus on the use of water. Fracking is a process dependent on water; in fact, between 50,000 gallons and 350,000 gallons of water are required to fracture one single horizontal well in a shale formation. It cannot be denied that the sheer volume of water used has the potential to cause great water stress in the areas concerned and could seriously deplete our resources.

Furthermore, there is the issue of contamination. Fracking does not use only water. A wide range of worrying chemicals are employed in the process. Water contamination does not stem from the use of chemical substances only; water used in fracking requires treatment after use, as the process has been shown to increase risk by the release of heavy metals, such as mercury and even arsenic.

In the guidance for licensees for Tamboran Resources, Northern Ireland Water expressed concern regarding the impact such work could have on the quality of its raw water supply. Given the experience of some US citizens regarding the flammability of home water supplies in the vicinity of fracking sites, I call for a full investigation into the impact that fracking could have on not only aquatic ecology but on our water supply.

Water quality and quantity in neighbouring rivers and loughs need to be consistently monitored as fish and other aquatic ecology are highly sensitive to changes in these areas. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) stated in licensing guidelines:

"aquatic ecology can be impacted not only in the immediate area of the work but also significant distances downstream".

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for giving way. This is obviously a matter that she is extremely passionate and concerned about. I recognise those concerns. How many licences have been granted on the issue?

Ms Lo: I understand that four licences have been granted by DETI in Northern Ireland. I have serious concerns about how difficult it would be to predict the water quality, given the sheer amount of water that will be required for the process.

The threat from well blowout is not a benign one. Water deposits may be affected if there are weaknesses or cracks in well casing. According to the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change, fracking would require very stringent health and safety mechanisms to test the integrity of well casing.

The US, in particular, has seen several worrying well blowouts, which have resulted in thousands of gallons of contaminated and untreated water flowing through neighbouring land, which, in turn, has led to the evacuation or, in some circumstances, the relocation of families. The leak of contaminated water and back-flow fluids has resulted in the death of nearby aquatic life and posed serious health risks to the local communities.

Dr Theo Colborn was quoted as saying that the contamination of water from fracking could have negative health implications, including dizziness, headaches, and even irreversible brain damage, on human beings.

Fracking can lead not only to pollution of our water supplies; there are also issues regarding noise and air pollution, which are all products of the degradation that comes with the industrialisation of our beautiful natural landscape. The link between seismic activity and fracking urgently requires investigation before any exploration proceeds. Following two tremors in Lancaster, one of which reached 2.3 on the Richter scale, Cuadrilla suspended its hydraulic fracturing and commissioned a report that concluded this month that it was highly probable that the company's operations were

to blame for the tremors. The company has now accepted that. It has since been revealed that the number of tremors is likely to be around 50 in the space of eight months. Consequently, shale gas experts have admitted that there is a pressing need to investigate and understand the link between the mechanisms used and the tremors.

The last line of the motion is crucial. Why are we discussing permitting further fossil fuel exploration and use, instead of putting our efforts into increasing our environmental and economic sustainability? Why are we actively putting in place new licences that will increase global warming? At the end of the day, shale gas is a fossil fuel. Although I appreciate that there are disputes over the cleanliness of shale gas, one report from Cornell University suggests that the carbon footprint of shale gas is just as bad, or worse, than coal. We really need to start facing the reality that our dependence on fossil fuel is detrimental to our environment and our economy in terms of high fuel prices and potential fines for carbon emissions. The bottom line is that it is not sustainable. We must start working harder to incorporate renewable energy into our economy and our way of life. In Northern Ireland, we have the benefit of excellent natural resources, which could catapult us to becoming world leaders in developing renewable energy. Not only would the green new deal help our environment and create jobs, it would put us at the forefront of green innovation and technology.

At this stage, no economic argument can overcome the concerns regarding the environmental and health risks that have been raised about the impact of hydraulic fracturing. We cannot put a price on safety, and we cannot afford to pay the price of not giving the issue due attention and care. It cannot be determined that the possible economic benefits would present a public interest that would override the potential detrimental environmental and health damages.

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

Ms Lo: In Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the Minister's constituency, it would be hard to argue in favour of fracking for economic reasons, given the potential negative impact on Lough Erne. With a licensed commercial scale —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time.

Ms Lo: — fishery valued at between £3 million and £4 million generating local employment and tourism, Lough Erne needs to be protected for fiscal as well as environmental reasons — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Members to order. The Member is over her time. We now move to the next Member to speak.

Mr Moutray: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I am slightly bemused by the motion before us this morning. The motion has been proposed by those who keep reminding us of the need to identify and utilise alternative sources of energy, and yet they seem to be paranoid about any effort that is made to find solutions to our energy needs — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The sitting is suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 11.39 am and resumed at 11.41 am.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I wish to make an announcement. We are here for a debate. The public are entitled to hear that debate, but if there are any more interventions from the Public Gallery, I will ask for it to be cleared, and the debate will continue in the public's absence. You can participate in the debate by listening. I ask Members not to refer to the Public Gallery, and I ask that people in the Public Gallery do not intervene in the debate.

Mr Moutray: Given the outrageous behaviour that we have had this morning, we should clear the Public Gallery. I have been a Member for 10 years, and I have never seen behaviour like that which we have just witnessed — it was absolutely appalling — and I trust that I never will again. I request that the Public Gallery be cleared.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The decision that I have made is that, if there are no further interventions, the debate will continue. We will not clear the Public Gallery at this point.

Mr Moutray: The issue of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is very complex, but a fair amount of time has already been devoted to it in the Assembly. It has been the subject of many Assembly questions, and the Minister has already answered many of the key concerns. Those who tabled the motion and those who support it are making much of the perceived risks to health and safety. Some of their concerns are outlined in the motion. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment is aware of the concerns. I have received e-mails and other correspondence from people expressing a range of concerns and asking me to support the motion. I understand the concerns, but they are not well founded. At least the debate will give the Minister an opportunity to clarify a number of issues, put the record straight and, hopefully, alleviate some of the genuine concerns.

It is worth pointing out that some of the concerns outlined in the motion were experienced in the USA. However, that was largely as a result of poor regulation and should not be exaggerated. There have been many successful explorations in America. Lessons have been learnt from any mistakes, and I am confident that they will not be repeated in Northern Ireland. The types of scenarios that are outlined in the motion are highly unlikely; otherwise, I would support it. I may be wrong, but, as I understand it, the licence that was issued to the Australian firm Tamboran in Fermanagh is for exploration purposes only. We have not gone beyond that stage. Contrary to what Ms Lo said, no licences have been issued to drill at this time.

It is also worth noting that shale gas was the subject of an investigation by a Select Committee of the House of Commons as recently as May this year. It concluded that the risks of water contamination are due to issues of well integrity. They are no different to concerns that are encountered during the extraction of oil and gas from conventional reservoirs. The Select Committee also concluded that there should be no moratorium on the use of hydraulic fracturing.

It should be noted that shale gas is 50% cleaner than oil in respect of greenhouse gas emissions and 25% cleaner than oil when used in transportation, and it is likely to be only a quarter of the price. I am confident that the potential benefits that may flow from hydraulic fracturing, if properly regulated, managed and controlled, will greatly outweigh any risks.

11.45 am

Northern Ireland has a fine reputation for its pioneering skills and enterprising spirit. Let us not sulk in the corner seeing only dangers and problems. Let us look for ways around those problems and ways in which we can embrace every opportunity. Potentially, we have a tremendous opportunity to develop new indigenous sources of energy. Is that not a prize worth striving for? I oppose the motion.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím chun tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. First, I would like to distance myself and my party from the comments that came from the Public Gallery.

I support the motion in order to send a clear message of support to those who have worked to raise awareness of the issue of fracking across Ireland and to show my solidarity with the campaigners who have travelled here in good faith this morning. I congratulate the proposer of the motion for the way in which she has covered a complicated and controversial topic.

Before I start, I should probably declare an interest in the topic. I come from west Fermanagh, where plans are in place for fracking to take place. The Member from the other side of the House is correct: a licence has not been issued to allow fracking, but the plans are there. I come from west Fermanagh, and most of my family, from my mother's and father's sides, live, work and farm in the area. I am very proud of where I come from and of the people I represent. So I know all too well of the fears that exist in west Fermanagh about the proposals to extract gas from the county.

This is not the first time that the issue of fracking has been raised in the House. I must say that the flippant way in which the Minister dealt with the matter on the two previous occasions when it was discussed annoyed an awful lot of people in her constituency, particularly when she accused me of scaremongering and of stopping jobs coming into Fermanagh. I appeal to her today to be more mature, to be less dismissive and to actually take the genuine concerns and the very real dangers that exist into consideration when responding to the debate.

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for giving way. It is my understanding that, from as early as 2000, work of a similar nature was done in Fermanagh. No major concerns were raised at that stage and, as far as I am aware, no negative environmental impact occurred either. Why is it that we were only given the successful track record of that type of work in America, where there have been in the region of 50,000 or 60,000 fracking attempts without any impact on the environment, about which concerns are being raised today? .

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

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his intervention. He will be aware that 596 different chemicals were not added to the ground back in 2000 or at any other time when gas exploration work has taken place in Fermanagh. That is one of the differences. He also says that fracking has successfully taken place in America. My definition of successful does not include contaminating water supplies, killing animals, giving people cancer and being able to set water supplies on fire.

Fracking is very much a new and emerging technology, and we should not be rushing to use it without taking all of the facts on board. Anna Lo detailed where bans are in place across the world. Fracking has been banned, for example, in France, where around 80% of the energy generated comes from nuclear power. So, if the French Government, in their wisdom, believe that nuclear power is all right but fracking is bad, there must be something wrong with it.

The points about the potential environmental and health consequences have been well made and will, no doubt, be well rehearsed before the end of the debate. Many Members will focus on the potential contamination of our water supply and on the risk to the nearby environment and the health of our people in the areas that may be affected as a result of a toxic cocktail of dangerous chemicals being added to our natural environment. I, however, would like to focus on the damage that will be done to Fermanagh's economic potential as a result of the plans.

At present, Fermanagh has two thriving industries: tourism and agriculture. If fracking were to be given the go-ahead in west Fermanagh, there would be a massive detrimental impact on the number of people visiting the county. People come to Fermanagh to enjoy a clean environment, fresh air and tranquillity. In one of its recent public meetings, Tamboran revealed that if the process gets the green light, it plans to install nearly 200 9-acre concrete drill pads across west Fermanagh. That will, no doubt, impact on our beautiful landscape.

Many people come to Fermanagh to make use of the waterways, particularly Lough Melvin, Lough MacNea and, of course, Lough Erne. However, any potential contamination to the water will surely leave people reluctant to use those waterways for outdoor activities. There has to be a certain irony in the fact that the Minister last week launched the Lough Erne product development study, which identifies strategic plans for future waterways investment. We must ask whether there is a chance that her Department will allow fracking to proceed.

Lough Melvin, which is near Garrison, where I come from, is internationally renowned for its range of unique plants and animals. There are widely held and genuine concerns about the impact that fracking could have on the delicate ecological balance in places such as Lough Melvin. Across west Fermanagh, many people are employed in the agrifood sector, and given the risk of damage to animal health and contamination of the water supply, we need to be very cautious about giving anyone the right to put it in jeopardy.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: No; I am running out of time, so I apologise.

DUP and DETI representatives have said, and will say, much about security of supply and about how we need to focus on the manipulation of modern forms of energy. I know that shale gas may be modern for any Member who believes that the earth is only 6,000 years old. However, this is a fossil fuel; the clue is in the name. This is not modern, and gas is not an alternative to gas.

A Westminster Committee carried out a detailed inquiry into the matter, and far be it from me to sell its message, but its report stated that:

"shale gas was unlikely to be a 'game-changer'".

It also stated that:

"energy security considerations should not be the main driver of policy on the exploitation of shale gas."

Mr Nesbitt: Perhaps I could begin by trying to be clear, definitive and unambiguous about my party's position: we are not in favour of any hydraulic fracturing while there is any reasonable doubt that it has a negative impact on the environment. I will come back, if I may, to reasonable doubt in a moment.

Let me suggest a form of words that we would have welcomed as an amendment: we would have called on the Minister to ensure that, before any hydraulic fracturing takes place, a detailed environmental impact assessment is carried out to confirm that there will be no resulting damage to the area in question. Hopefully, that is clear and unambiguous.

In that context, I will explain why we struggle to support the motion. The first element of the motion calls for a withdrawal of licences. However, it is hard to support that without knowing the cost of withdrawing licences. That refers not only to the cash cost or the potential cost of licensees' litigation but to the reputational cost to Northern Ireland plc. Are we open for business or are we not open for business? With our current issues about energy, not least its cost and the security of supply, why do we want to close down an operation without good reason?

That element of the motion also calls for an environmental impact assessment "into the practice". Who will do that? As we heard, that practice is conducted in many American states and in Germany, Poland, Sweden and Ukraine. Would we do it ourselves, or would there be an international assessment?

The second element of the motion states that:

"hydraulic fracturing can put local water sources at risk of contamination".

I have no difficulty with that. Of course it can; I have seen the clips of 'Gasland' on YouTube. However, oil drilling can also go horrendously wrong, and with 70% of our households dependent on home heating oil, are we really saying that we should stop importing heating oil because of the potential danger?

The third part of the motion talks about:

"a variety of adverse environmental impacts".

It also says that:

"the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts, which put both workers and local communities at risk".

Once again, what about the Gulf of Mexico and the blowout in oil drilling that happened there? Are we to stop oil drilling, or do we stop importing oil when we are 70% dependent on it?

The fourth part of the motion states that:

"the production of hard-to-reach fossil fuels is not compatible with efforts to achieve carbon reduction targets".

I would welcome further information on that, and I would welcome a further debate on it but with an open mind. Surely a natural energy source could be a Holy Grail for Northern Ireland and should not be rejected out of turn.

Finally, the motion:

“urges the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give greater support to the generation of energy from renewable sources instead.”

I believe that that final word, “instead”, is a clue to the real intent of those who authored the motion. It is not about a moratorium: it is a straightforward no to hydraulic fracking. Therefore, it is not about a cautious approach; it is about outright opposition before the full facts have been established. My party would very much welcome further divvying up of the full facts and some frank, open and honest debate.

On that subject, I am sure that many Members have received many petitions, e-mails and letters on this issue. I want to mention a briefing for medical practitioners that I received. It is 19 pages long. On page 17, it includes a suggested template letter for the convenience of doctors and medical practitioners. A key paragraph of the letter is worded as follows:

“My private research into the technology to be used leads me to have very serious concerns regarding its safety”.

It seems to me that that wording is trying to encourage medical practitioners to pretend that they have conducted their own private research. I contacted one of the authors —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. It is important to note that, at the end of the briefing, it urges doctors to conduct their own research and, in doing so, come to their own conclusions. It highlights the concerns of one doctor and the other authors of the paper.

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

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. Perhaps I could go on to explain that I was so disturbed by that annex that I sent an e-mail to the contract address that was attached to the document and asked the recipient to call my mobile phone urgently. In fairness, that person did so. We discussed that particular paragraph and whether it actually encourages medical practitioners to state that they have conducted private research. I hope that the House will accept that, as a journalist, I am not bad at making contemporaneous notes. The response was, “There is no point you challenging the authors of this document.”

I believe that there is every point in challenging the authors of the document.

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

Mr Nesbitt: My party will bring forward its own motion in the new year. I am afraid that we may be forced to abstain on this occasion.

Mr Byrne: I want to say at the outset that the SDLP supports the motion, even though we have concerns about parts of it. It is fair to say that Northern Ireland is so highly dependent on imported oil, particularly for generation of electricity, that we have to be open-minded about new sources of energy.

Hydraulic fracturing poses great concerns for communities in areas for which licences have been issued. The situation is the same as it was for lignite in County Antrim 10 or 12 years ago. It raises the same concerns. People are concerned about contamination of the environment and the water supply. We are back at the same place.

Hydraulic fracturing is, primarily, about pumping very high volumes of water into the ground in order to force gas up and out through the earth. The problem is whether outputs of gas to the surface can be controlled. There are two major concerns. The first is about contamination of the water supply. Given that high volumes of water that have been mixed with chemicals have to be pumped into the bore well, that raises concern about possible contamination of the water table and underground water. People of Fermanagh, in particular, have great concerns about what might be the ramifications for them, their environment and their two primary industries, agriculture and tourism, which were referred to by Mr Flanagan.

The second concern relates to use of the technology. Is it precise, refined and controllable? That is an open question. There is great concern that, when high-pressure water is pumped into the bowels of the earth and fissures or cracks are exploited, there is no way to control cracks that then emerge on the surface. That is where major concerns arise about control of the output of the gas. Can it be collected on the surface at manageable locations? That is an open question. I contend that the technology has not yet been refined anywhere.

If we look at the great example of exploring for fossil fuels in the USA, we will see that a number of states have become so concerned that they have passed legislation. For example, in May 2010, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed a Bill that enforced a three-year moratorium on further leasing of exploration acreage of Marcellus shale until a comprehensive environmental impact assessment has been carried out.

That is the question. If we are issuing exploration licences, is it permitted development or not? Will environmental concerns be considered?

12.00 noon

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he acknowledge that one of the issues in the United States of America, in particular, was that many states had little or no regulation around fracking? You cannot compare that to Northern Ireland, where there is a lot of regulation. Before you would even get to the stage of drilling, you have an environmental impact assessment and all the planning guidelines to get round. You cannot compare where the United States was 10 years ago with where Northern Ireland is today.

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

Mr Byrne: I thank Mr Ross for his statement. He has brought some reality to the debate.

The question is whether this will be permitted development or whether there will be consultation with the Planning Service, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and other concerns. That is why we need an explanation of what

licences are. Are they desktop exercises, or do they allow for the start of real and practical exploration for gas?

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member has said that we need an explanation of what licences are, yet the motion calls for the withdrawal of licences. If the Member, by his own admission, does not know what he is supporting and what is proposed in the motion how, in earth's name, can people stand by this motion?

Mr Byrne: I will not take a lecture from Mr Weir or anyone else. The motion calls for a moratorium. The SDLP believes — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Byrne: The SDLP believes that the cautionary approach is the proper way to look at the issue. Until there is reassurance for local communities, there will be grave concerns. Let us try to ensure that there are proper explanations and proper consultations with the local communities that will have to endure what would be actual exploration.

In August 2010, the state of New York imposed a temporary moratorium on new shale gas activity until the US Environmental Protection Agency had reported on its study of shale gas. The state of New Jersey imposed a one-year moratorium from 25 August 2011. The technology for the mining of fossil fuels is very strong in the US; if those states are urging a cautionary mode, we should also pursue that mode.

We are largely in favour of the motion, but we recognise that the last third of the motion is prescriptive, in that it emphasises the use of only "renewable energy sources". We need to have an open mind about trying to exploit the potential of shale gas, but we have to make sure that the technology is perfected and the environmental issues properly addressed.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. Many in Northern Ireland face the challenge of the ever-increasing cost of energy. Given the seriousness of the current problem, we need to take this opportunity to explore all possible options for tackling it. At this early stage, it would be premature to block any attempts at looking for alternative methods.

We rely on imported energy supplies. We cannot continue with that overdependence, and we need to look at all potential energy sources. Northern Ireland has the potential to reduce its reliance on imported energy supplies, and we should not rule out any possible alternatives, particularly when work is still at an early stage. Instead, we should openly investigate all methods and possibilities of energy creation. Currently, 66% of our population rely on oil for home heating. That is unsustainable, and we should actively try to address it.

Britain faces an energy shortfall, and we must actively look at alternative means of energy. By doing so, we could not only help to make prices more competitive for bill payers but help the local economy, not least in the creation of new jobs. Hydraulic fracturing is an option that is worth considering. It is essential that the process is fully regulated, as it has been to date. It is important that environmental concerns are addressed, especially those of people who live in areas

where fracturing may take place. Residents and landowners can and should play an active role in that process because they are most directly affected.

The current process, which includes exploration of shale gas in certain areas in the Republic of Ireland, as well as parts of Northern Ireland, should not be dismissed prematurely without the full rigours of the regulatory process being undertaken. Renewable energy sources also have a role to play in making our future energy supplies more sustainable and efficient. They, too, should be monitored continually and explored for value and effectiveness.

To propose a moratorium at this early stage of the exploration process, as the motion suggests, shows neither leadership nor a realistic way of tackling the real problem of over-reliance on imported oil and gas that this country faces today. This is an opportunity for Northern Ireland that should not be overlooked. Lessons can and should be learned from across the world on the issue. Should the exploration process show evidence that there may be potential for gas supply locally, all regulatory processes should, quite rightly, be taken through to evaluate hydraulic fracturing, taking on board all the concerns and issues that surround it. I oppose the motion.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank its proposer for bringing it to the House. It is obviously an emotive issue, and I welcome the debate, which needs to take place here and in the communities that will be affected.

Clearly, there are public concerns about hydraulic fracturing. It is banned in France, the United States, Germany and South Africa, as Anna Lo mentioned. An independent report published in Britain said that it is highly probable that fracking resulted in tremors in Blackpool. Of course, on the other side of the coin, there are many energy-dependent countries that see it as an opportunity, regardless of the risk. The question for us, however, has to be this: what is the potential cost of hydraulic fracturing? That is where residents and communities are coming from, as well as many professionals and researchers who have looked into the issue.

I agree with the proposer of the motion that there should be an environmental impact assessment. That should be carried out as a priority, and the public need to be across the full facts of the situation, as do Members of the House. That goes for communities right across the North. There has been a particular focus on Fermanagh, but communities in other areas such as north Antrim may be affected and need to be aware of what hydraulic fracturing could cause. Tourism could also be affected by noise pollution. There could also be an impact on the landscape, on traffic and on road damage, all of which need to be taken into account.

There have not been many issues on which we have received such a plethora of e-mails and other correspondence from constituents as well as professors from UCD and people who live in Australia. This is a big issue. I want to read an excerpt from an e-mail that I received from a GP in Tempo, County Fermanagh:

"Five hundred wells are planned and some will be repeatedly fracked. In order to pump millions of gallons of water with sand, plus or minus other chemicals, up to a mile vertically down a borehole and then horizontally

for up to another mile with enough force to shatter and fracture the formation, immense power will be needed. Banks of huge diesel compressors will be kept running day and night for weeks at a time on each of the 500 wells. The incessant noise will be extreme, and plumes of diesel fumes will be pumped into the air day and night with resultant smog. The roads will be torn up with huge trucks ferrying water, sand and chemicals to the rigs and contaminated water away from the rigs. Millions of gallons of water will be forced down each of the 500 wells and between 20% and 80% of this will come back to the surface as severely contaminated waste water and will have to be disposed of."

That does not paint a pretty picture. There has also been correspondence from a professor in UCD's school of chemistry and chemical biology noting extreme concern about the proposal. We should be cognisant of those voices and opinions, and we need to focus on the wording at the end of the motion about renewables, because we should not forget that we are one of the only countries in Europe that has great potential in wind energy, hydro-energy and tidal energy. Scotland is light years ahead with that, whereas we are going too slowly.

The fact of the matter is that the party across the way has held the enterprise, trade and investment portfolio for a number of years. It also held the Department of the Environment portfolio, which deals with planning, for a number of years, and this issue is not going fast enough.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Mr Ross: Will the Member accept that this is a debate about the potential to lower energy prices and that one of the contributing factors to lowering energy prices in Northern Ireland will be the interconnector? Will he not acknowledge that his party's opposition to that could end up costing households across Northern Ireland much more through higher energy bills?

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

Mr McKay: I agree with the Member that there is clearly a need for infrastructure that allows us to get energy from renewables on to the grid. However, I want to discuss this issue and the controversy around it. The DUP has a policy of embracing every energy opportunity regardless of the consequences. In the previous Assembly, we had a debate on nuclear energy, and the DUP would not rule out building nuclear power plants across the North. The DUP is willing to take risks regardless of the impact that they will have on the environment, our waterways and our communities. Before we do anything, we have to carry out environmental impact assessments and be across the detail before we even consider undertaking the process that is proposed.

Mr Frew: This is a very important debate, although I do not feel that the timing is right. There is a lot of concern out there about the issue, and there have been — it is not nice to say it — scaremongers among us, even during today's debate. The horror stories and the extremes that we have heard in the Chamber go some way towards explaining why there is so much public concern at present.

It has been said that we need explanations and clarity. I have taken it upon myself to seek that clarity and to ask the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment a series of questions on hydraulic fracturing. I will outline some of the answers that I have received. I hope that they provide clarification for Members. In response to a question for written answer, the Minister said:

"The drilling of an exploration borehole involving hydraulic fracturing will require planning permission under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999".

So, first of all, the licences are not for hydraulic fracturing; they are for exploration and boreholing, and people will have to seek planning permission to frack hydraulically.

People have been coming to me to ask for information, and, in another response, the Minister told me that the company in Fermanagh that is involved in fracking:

"have stated their intention not to use any chemicals ... in their fracking fluids."

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Go on ahead, yes.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate that the Member has done his own research into the matter, but, for his interest, the chief executive of Tamboran has now admitted in an interview in the Republic of Ireland that chemicals would be required.

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

Mr Frew: This is what it comes down to: where is the information? Give us the information on what chemicals are being used. Let us have a proper debate about this, and let us find the information instead of scaremongering among our people. I am from north Antrim, and I know the concerns that people from north Antrim have about lignite. I know the difference between lignite mining and shale gas exploration and mining, which were compared earlier. There is a world of difference between the two, and I do not support lignite mining in any shape or form. However, we need to ensure that we explore every avenue that is open to us so that we can have the fuel to fund and run this country, to produce food for this country and to produce food for the world. It is all tied up, and some of the contributors to the debate have not helped to assuage the concerns of our people. It is about legislation —

12.15 pm

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Go ahead.

Mr Swann: The Member mentioned the concerns of people in north Antrim about lignite mining. Has he received any correspondence from residents in north Antrim who are concerned about the fact that fracturing may take place off the Rathlin basin as far down as Ballymoney?

Mr Frew: To date, I have received no such correspondence from people in north Antrim. I have received many pieces of correspondence from Fermanagh, but I have received none from County Antrim. Although people are concerned about

and interested in the subject, they realise that we have to worry about the security of our energy.

Sometimes, I have to laugh at Sinn Féin's stance on some issues. They are in danger of becoming the "no" men of Ulster: if it is not hydraulic fracturing that they are against, it is the North/South interconnector, which we need badly, and nuclear fuel. It should be realised that we already benefit from nuclear fuel in Northern Ireland. So, people have to be careful about how they take the debate. Let us talk about the fact that Sinn Féin is so opposed to Rose Energy. When will Sinn Féin say yes to the people of Northern Ireland around fuel and around energy?

Mr Boylan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Sorry, I will not give way any more. I have already given way twice.

This is about keeping Northern Ireland's options open. It is about ensuring that our people have the best choice available to keep their fuel costs down. Sometimes, it is easy to complain and to protest about things, but, when you are in a position of leadership, it is about how you inform yourself, take things forward and legislate. That is where the US failed, although only a small number of the 50,000 wells failed there. It is about legislation, restrictions and ensuring that we control the process to the best of our ability. There are risks. Every day there are risks, but it is about managing risks. I oppose the motion.

Mr Kinahan: As many of you will understand, I am pleased to speak in the debate, particularly as the Ulster Unionist environment spokesman. There are some, not many, in the Chamber who are more environmentally conscious than me. It is our job in the Assembly to find balance and to use common sense, and today is a perfect example of trying to find balance.

We need the resources from another power source. We are told that gas will run out some time around 2068, and we know that petrol, which is getting more and more expensive, will run out. We know how important it is to the cost of everything that we do. So much of what we do is based on fuel, whether it is the heating of our houses or the fuelling of cars. As an Assembly, we must find the balance between looking for that power and protecting the environment.

Most of us have been lobbied on the issue, and, as the previous Member who spoke said, we have to get the emotion out of the debate. We have to find the right information and the right way forward for Northern Ireland. The mere fact that France has banned it probably means that it is the right thing not to ban it, as there are always other interests. Some countries have banned it, and others have allowed it, which confirms my point that we have to ensure that we have all the details and make the right decisions.

We are told that it may cause an earthquake —

Mr Byrne: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: Not just yet; I will in a minute.

We are told it may cause an earthquake; we are told it may pollute our rivers; we are told we are not sure what it will do to greenhouse gases. There is a mass of unknowns. Look at the earthquake: if I may hesitate for a bit of humour, in Blackpool we know of one person whom the earth moved for

that night. Maybe there were many more, and it was not due to fracking.

Look at pollution of rivers. Something I have always pushed for here is the proper sampling of our rivers. That should be happening all the time, and we should have checks in place. We should be monitoring our rivers and looking at water treatment. As far as greenhouse gases go, we do not understand that. We will keep looking and checking. We do not know our way forward. I will give way now.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that France has had a very diverse energy source policy for many years, including a well-developed nuclear energy policy, and that the states in America that urge a cautionary approach must have some reason for doing so?

Mr Kinahan: I welcome what you said, and I do not fully know everything that France is doing. However, you have just really made my point: we need to know more. We need to look at all the different matters that are behind this. Our party feels that we should have had a different amendment today, and we will table a motion on this subject in the new year.

As I said, the Northern Ireland economy is driven by the freight industry and the use of oil. We can look and must keep looking at all the alternative forms of energy. Solar struggles here. We are still in the very early days of finding our way forward with wind and hydro. There are many others. We must keep looking for the alternatives and trying to find the way forward, but not at the cost of stopping ourselves finding what my colleague called the Holy Grail for Northern Ireland.

The problem for us is the wording of the motion. It calls for a moratorium and a withdrawal of the licences. We would like to have seen it calling for an environmental impact assessment. We do not feel that a moratorium will work for Northern Ireland, and we know that there will be legal and cost issues in withdrawing the licences.

I hate seeing anything in the Assembly being delayed. It is a habit of ours that causes much damage to many of our decisions by being too slow. Today, however, we have to wait until we know more detail on the subject, debate it again in the near future and find the right way forward. We must not stop ourselves finding the right sources. At the same time, however, we must protect the environment. We will abstain today.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. Only six months ago, very few of us knew of the term "fracking"; today, it is common currency, particularly in my area and county and the counties of Leitrim and Cavan. That is due to a high-profile campaign by concerned citizens from the region, some of whom have travelled here today to listen to the debate.

The issue of fracturing has already created opposing opinions. Supporters will argue that shale gas could resolve the energy crisis for the next 100 years and that the method of extracting that gas from deep in the earth is safe and environmentally friendly, with a minimal footprint. To understand more about the process and what the company had to say, I attended a public meeting in Enniskillen last July. The spokesperson stated that fracturing had no negative impact on the local communities and that we all

should embrace the new technology as progress for the economy and society and in the creation of much-needed jobs.

Concerned citizens were subtly accused of scaremongering, living in the past, blocking progress and failing to understand what was in their interest. However, opponents who attended that meeting pointed to the catastrophic environmental and health costs that fracking caused, particularly the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water. Fracking has been most vigorously criticised for the damage caused by its waste water, which includes chemicals and radioactive elements such as radium. Those toxins have, according to reports, polluted rivers, streams and lakes. That would be devastating for the county that I and the Minister come from, a region that has many rivers and streams.

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lynch: I will give way in half a minute.

A study commissioned by the American petroleum industry, which was leaked to 'The New York Times', concluded that radium in waste water dumped off the coast of Louisiana posed a significant cancer risk to people who ate fish from the Gulf of Mexico. Throughout the US, there have been other nightmare stories. As somebody else mentioned, those were highlighted in the film 'Gasland', which tells the stories of many Americans whose water supplies have been polluted by fracturing. Such stories may be passed off as nonsense, but France, as other Members have said, was the first nation to ban hydraulic fracturing after the Government there came under heavy pressure from concerned citizens.

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that, like myself and many other Members, he is concerned about the rising cost of energy. I am sure he is concerned about the finite energy resources. Is it not the case that shale gas has the potential not only to stabilise the energy supply but to stabilise the cost of gas in particular and energy sources in general?

Mr Lynch: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am not against the use of energy for society, but that should not be at any cost.

Ms Gildernew: I noted with interest the talk from the opposite Benches about how shale gas will encourage cheaper energy. I have not heard any guarantee of that. Yet, in the meantime, we could destroy our agriculture industry, our tourism industry and the water quality that we enjoy. There are too many things that we know can go wrong and no guarantees about cheap energy.

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

Mr Lynch: I thank the Member for her intervention.

These gases could be taken from the earth in many generations' time, when they are safe to the community and society as a whole. The motion states that a moratorium should be placed on the onshore and offshore exploration development of shale gas. In light of all the serious questions about fracturing, the Minister should immediately take the same course of action as places such as Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and, as I mentioned,

France. In response to Mr Newton, I say that we should not have fuel at any cost to society.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business after lunch will be Question Time. The last Member to speak in this debate before the Minister responds will be Mr John Dallat.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 10 has been withdrawn.

Equality Legislation

1. **Mr McClarty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timescale and plans for bringing Northern Ireland equality legislation into line with the equality legislation in Great Britain. (AQO 928/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): We are considering the options for legislative reform here. However, we continue to legislate to meet our commitments under the Programme for Government, EU obligations, case law requirements and emerging issues.

Since the restoration of devolution, we have introduced legislation to strengthen and improve the rights of individuals in a number of areas. For example, we have introduced changes to disability discrimination legislation to improve the lives of people with disabilities. We have amended the definition of disability so that people with progressive conditions are deemed disabled from the point of diagnosis, and we have made it unlawful to treat a disabled person less favourably than others for reasons of disability in the disposal or management of residential, commercial and other premises.

We have also imposed new duties on public authorities and private clubs to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people and have made it unlawful for transport operators to discriminate against a disabled person. In addition, one of our commitments in the draft Programme for Government is to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. We need to ensure that our citizens enjoy the same protections as others across the European Union, and we will therefore consider the implications of these developments in deciding the future direction of equality legislation here.

Mr McClarty: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. He will be aware that there is a significant shortfall between the single Equality Act 2010 in GB and Northern Ireland equality legislation. New businesses will not be encouraged to establish themselves in Northern Ireland if they face challenges regarding differing legislative frameworks within the United Kingdom. How does the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister intend to address the inconsistencies faced by employers and service providers operating in both Northern Ireland and GB regarding, for example, discrimination legislation?

Mr M McGuinness: No decision has been taken on a single equality Bill. We continue to keep the broad spectrum of equality legislation under review and are committed to the principle of equality for all people here. Our officials continue

to assess and keep the First Minister and me informed of developments elsewhere in relation to proposals for equality legislation. We continue to review legislation on an ongoing basis to ensure that we meet all requirements.

It is clear, given the backdrop of the very successful period of foreign direct investment that we have seen over the past couple of years, that we have an attractive proposition to put to potential investors, no matter where they come from. That has been a great success. I do not need to outline all the companies that have come here recently, but it is quite a number, and the investment has been very substantial.

This issue was aired on countless occasions during the previous Assembly mandate and no doubt will be again in the course of this term. We must go forward on the basis of understanding that there are different opinions about this, not just in the Assembly but among the different interest groups. It is important that we continue to strive to ensure that we put in place the proper support and protections that citizens require. That is why the proposals put forward by the Equality Commission in a number of areas are under serious consideration in regard to further legislation.

Mr Elliott: I thank the deputy First Minister. What impact does he believe the recent decision by the Belfast Lord Mayor not to present a Duke of Edinburgh's Award to a local young female in the community will have on equality issues?

Mr M McGuinness: This has been a sizeable story in the media in recent times and has generated a lot of heat. I welcome the fact that the mayor has apologised for what undoubtedly was a mistake. There is a clear commitment that it will not be repeated. However, people should resist the temptation to inflame the situation, and I think that there was some of that in the past couple of days. When someone makes a mistake, the important thing is that they put their hand up and apologise. As far as I am concerned, the mayor was big enough, in the first instance, to attend the Duke of Edinburgh awards presentation. Moreover, he acknowledged his mistake, put his hand up and made it clear that he should apologise, which he did, and I believe that it was a full apology.

It is sensible for all of us not to make a meal out of it but to move on and understand that, in certain circumstances, all of us will be challenged on issues that concern our constituents. However, we all have to continue to stretch out the hand of friendship to one another and not make life difficult for one another. I am afraid that, in this circumstance, we saw that happen.

Mrs McKeivitt: In reference to other equality legislation, will the deputy First Minister give a timetable for when the legislation to eliminate age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services will be brought before the House?

Mr M McGuinness: No decisions will be made on the scope of age goods, facilities and services legislation until the proposals have been developed and consulted on. We will consult on the scope of age goods, facilities and services legislation as part of the policy development process. That will consider which age groups should be covered by the legislation. In addressing the issue of age, we are dealing with the only major equality ground where people do not have protection from discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. The commitment in the

Programme for Government to address that issue fills one of the major gaps in equality legislation here.

A5 and A8 Road Projects

2. **Mr Doherty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their meeting with the Irish Government in relation to the A5 and A8 road schemes. (AQO 929/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: We met the Taoiseach on Thursday 17 November in advance of the North/South Ministerial Council plenary meeting on 18 November. We told the Taoiseach that the A5 project was of great importance to the people of the north-west and would be of benefit to both jurisdictions. We noted that the Irish Government will now provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the project. Development work has been going well, and £40 million has already been spent. We also agreed that a further payment of £3 million will be made by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund in accordance with the agreed procedure.

We reiterated the Executive's commitment to the project and noted the Irish Government's commitment to deliver it on a longer timescale. It was agreed that the relevant Departments will now prepare a new funding and implementation plan for the projects for agreement at the next North/South Ministerial Council transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC plenary meeting. I encourage officials to work together creatively to see what improvements can be made soon to the A5, as some stretches are well below the standards needed for what is a very important route.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. In relation to the new funding and implementation plan, which, I believe, will report to the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting, will a draft of that plan be available to the Assembly and the relevant Committees before that date?

Mr M McGuinness: At the moment, the relevant Departments, North and South, have been charged with the responsibility of coming forward with the new funding and implementation plan. That needs to happen as a matter of urgency, given that it is a flagship issue for the North/South Ministerial Council. I think that I heard the Minister for Regional Development say during Question Time yesterday that the relevant officials will meet in January. If that is the case, they must be taking a very long Christmas holiday. I would like to see them meet this month so that, when we come back in January, we can hit the ground running and take the final decisions that are required to ensure that we know the direction in which the reprofiling of the project is going. That is essentially where it sits at the moment.

We all fully understand that the serious economic difficulties with which the Irish Government are dealing at the moment have impacted on us in respect of those flagship projects, not just the A5 but the A8, which is an important route to Larne from Belfast and for the eastern seaboard. I hope that officials, North and South, will move with all speed and that, in January 2012, we will have a good sense of how the projects will progress.

Mr Dickson: The deputy First Minister referred to the A8. The Republic of Ireland's contribution to funding the A5 is somewhat on the long finger. What effect will that have on the A8 project in east Antrim?

Mr M McGuinness: The two projects are joined at the hip, and they are flagship projects for the North/South Ministerial Council. The funding decisions that have been taken by the Irish Government have impacted on the timetable for moving forward. We are seeking as much certainty as we can not only for the £25 million in 2015 and the £25 million in 2016 but for the Irish Government's long-term commitment to providing the funding that is essential to build both those important roads.

I have a clear understanding, as, no doubt, do the Minister for Regional Development and others who are dealing with the issue, that we in the North were to front-load our financial commitment to the construction of the two roads and that the Irish Government's funding would come in the later years. We need certainty. We need to know from the Irish Government that they will fulfil their end of the bargain not only for the £50 million in 2015-16 but for longer-term funding. If we proceed with the road, we need an absolute guarantee that they will come in on their side of the bargain.

Mr Byrne: George Osborne made a statement on infrastructural funds last week. Does that have any implications for the A5, perhaps to ensure that the A5 and the A8 can be progressed as outlined and envisaged by Roads Service?

Mr M McGuinness: I have no doubt that, when Members heard the Chancellor's statement last week, their thoughts turned immediately to the prospect that some of that money could be moved in the direction of important infrastructural projects. The Executive will need a report from the Minister of Finance to outline our spending priorities for whatever extra money might come. The Executive will have to decide how those funds will be spent. I have no doubt that people, including the Minister for Regional Development, will look at all that and at the fact that there are other major road projects in the North that require attention.

In this question, we are dealing specifically with the A5 and the A8. As I said, those are flagship projects for the North/South Ministerial Council. At its last meeting just a few weeks ago, the North/South Ministerial Council made it clear that Departments are charged with the responsibility to come in with a new funding and implementation plan; that is a very significant decision. How that will be funded over a number of years is now the subject of decisions between the relevant Departments and, more importantly, a final decision by the North/South Ministerial Council.

2.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place for question 3.

Military Sites

4. **Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the transfer of military bases from the Ministry of Defence to their Department. (AQO 931/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Four sites were gifted to the Executive under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena, parts of St Lucia Barracks in Omagh and the Shackleton Barracks site at Ballykelly have been transferred to OFMDFM. The Lisanelly site in Omagh was transferred to the Department of Education for development as a schools campus. Specialist advice on the options for those OFMDFM sites is being developed with the help of the asset management unit, and we will consider the most appropriate way forward for each of them in due course.

Mr Swann: I thank the deputy First Minister. In keeping with the spirit of the military covenant, what discussions have been held with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that serving or former military personnel have preferential opportunities to purchase any homes that are transferred on those sites, for example in St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member is aware that this issue has come up a number of times in the past, particularly in relation to the fact that there are 47 houses there. We have agreed in principle with the Minister for Social Development that the 47 former military homes at St Patrick's Barracks will be made available for conversion to social housing. The Department for Social Development plans to make those properties available to a housing association that will manage the conversion so that the houses are available to help to address the identified need for social housing in the area. Our officials are completing the necessary due diligence required under public expenditure guidance and relevant legislation to enable the transfer to take place. The properties will be transferred from OFMDFM to DSD as soon as possible.

I am not aware of the demand in the particular specialist area of which you speak, namely people formerly associated with the military who want access to those sites. However, I have no doubt that that will be dealt with by the Department for Social Development and the housing association when that transfer from our Department to DSD takes place.

Mr Lyttle: Will the deputy First Minister tell the House why official advice with regard to a bid on the Shackleton site was declined by his Department?

Mr M McGuinness: The issue at Shackleton is clear from our perspective. We had a sales process for the site under which receipts would have been passed to us. That was undertaken by the Ministry of Defence. However, we concluded that none of the bids received by the Ministry of Defence was satisfactory, given the size and scale of the site. We, therefore, decided that our Department should take control of the site, and we issued a direction to that effect.

We had particular concern about the advice we had been given by officials. On decontamination costs, no detailed specific survey work had been done on the site at the time of the direction, and, in our view, no figure given to us had any basis in regard to the site. There are buildings on the site that could be used, so there was a question about whether decontamination costs were a real factor. We were also concerned that the value of the site was based on it all being sold as one site. No consideration had been given to how parcels of the site might bring a greater return. That is an issue that the First Minister and I discussed in the aftermath of his visit to the site some time ago. So we are

determined to obtain the best value out of this substantial asset, and we have asked that a full assessment be made of its potential.

Mr Campbell: The deputy First Minister is aware of the Shackleton site that he has just outlined and the transfer process that has now been completed. He will also be aware of the ongoing significant maintenance costs that will be incurred over the next year or two. Would it not be a productive idea for him to liaise with his colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that, if she decides to proceed with the relocation of DARD headquarters, a site such as Shackleton would be considered in order to ameliorate the ongoing costs, as well as to utilise a very worthwhile site?

Mr M McGuinness: We are determined to keep the holding costs of the sites to the minimum necessary while ensuring adequate security and health and safety. However, some costs are unavoidable. Security arrangements at the site are being reviewed, and other steps are being taken to ensure that we spend no more than is necessary. To date, the holding costs of the three Hillsborough agreement sites owned by OFMDFM are expected to be £765,000, of which £165,000 has been spent to date. Expenditure on St Patrick's Barracks was £139,000 up to 31 October.

I admire the Member's pitch for the relocation of the DARD site to his constituency. Given the fact that there might be boundary changes in the next while, it could also end up being my constituency, depending of course on who the DUP and Sinn Féin decide will be their candidate at the next general election. However, no doubt, DARD will give serious consideration to the location of its headquarters when the decision-making time comes.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What are the Minister's views on the recent Audit Office report?

Mr M McGuinness: I thank the Member for his question. It affords us the opportunity to clarify some issues that have arisen out of the reporting of the report's content. The Audit Office report on the transfer of former military and security sites relates to assets that were transferred under direct rule Ministers, even though the report refers to OFMDFM. As the report could be the subject of a future Public Accounts Committee hearing, it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Institutional Abuse

6. **Mr Givan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress made in establishing the inquiry into historical institutional abuse. (AQO 933/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Martina Anderson to answer that question.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh míle maith agat. Following consultation with victims and survivors over the summer and considering the recommendation of an interdepartmental task force, the First Minister and deputy First Minister called a special Executive meeting to

agree the establishment of an inquiry and investigation into historical abuse from 1945 onwards, and the chair can take account of reports of incidents before then.

We are considering potential legislative options that will provide the necessary statutory powers to the inquiry to enable the chairperson to call for and compel any person or document as required to be made available to the inquiry. Victims and survivors will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences to the inquiry in the confidential environment of an independent acknowledgement forum. That should be established early in the new year. The inquiry and investigation will conclude within two and a half years of the recommendation date, and the Chairperson will be required to provide a report to the Executive within six months of its conclusion.

We have also committed to the establishment of an advocacy service that will provide support to victims and survivors before, during and after the inquiry. Work is well under way to progress all the aspects that I detailed, and we will continue to liaise with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse about their needs and the steps that we are taking.

While we are working towards the full implementation of the inquiry and advocacy service, we are very conscious to ensure that the needs of victims and survivors are catered for in the short term. We have introduced and instructed officials to explore ways in which an interim support service can be provided.

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

Mr Givan: I welcome the progress that is being made on the issue. The Minister will be aware of the recent diocesan reports that were produced by the Roman Catholic Church this week. Will the reports that are relevant to Northern Ireland be included in this inquiry? Can the Minister assure us that the needs of the victims and survivors will be given the most important privilege and preference in all of this and not the needs of the legal profession?

Ms M Anderson: When we were talking to the victims and survivors, they asked us to ensure that the inquiry was not over-lawyered. We are very aware of the recent reports from the national safeguarding boards, two of which relate to dioceses in the North. The reports did not deal with abuse; they looked at how the Church authorities dealt with allegations of abuse. The general theme that we have seen emerging from a number of the reports has been that the Church was more concerned with protecting its image than with protecting the children who were being abused. That is a totally unacceptable position. Those in the Church hierarchy will need to examine their conscience on that and, obviously, the way in which they obsessively concealed the abuse. The reports indicated that procedures are now in place to ensure that allegations of abuse are reported to the proper authorities. That is something that we will be constantly monitoring.

As part of the consultation on historical institutional abuse, Minister Jonathan Bell and I met Ian Elliott of the national safeguarding board, and we intend to keep in touch with him as he reports on other dioceses in the North. In establishing the inquiry here, we have ensured that the chair of the inquiry, once appointed, will be able to make recommendations to us if he feels that there are other steps and issues that the Executive have to take account of.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the progress that has been made to date on the issue. Can the junior Minister inform us whether the task force or the Executive were aware of the situation at Lissue House and Forster Green when they were making their deliberations with regard to an inquiry into historical institutional abuse?

Ms M Anderson: The simple answer is no. As the Member will be aware from answers given in the Chamber, the task force was cross-departmental and included officials from the Health Department. When discussions were taking place at Executive level, the Health Minister at that time did not flag up the issue. We were not aware that abuse had taken place and that there had been reports on those institutions until the press coverage emerged. We are at a loss as to why that information was not shared with the office or the Department. The current Minister has made it clear that he was not aware of the issues relating to Lissue House and Forster Green until they were made public by a newspaper. The previous Health Minister has asserted that he was not aware of the issues. However, the Department has attested that he did and contested his assertion, claiming that he was informed.

The scrutinising Committee for the Health Department may want to look at the issue. We assure the Assembly that Lissue House and Forster Green Hospital will be included in the inquiry and investigation. The Assembly should be aware that through the consultation events, which the interdepartmental task force held, 23 institutions were reported as places where abuse had occurred. Neither Lissue House nor Forster Green was included in those 23. We cannot be sure of the level of the abuse in the institutions or the number of victims until the inquiry concludes its work.

Mr McDevitt: Given the way in which the events around Lissue House and Forster Green so vividly illustrate the seriousness of the issue across so many sectors, will the Minister give an absolute guarantee to the House that the inquiry will take place on a statutory basis? Will she tell the House when we can expect to see legislation before us that will give the necessary statutory powers to the inquiry?

Ms M Anderson: We can assure the House that the inquiry will have a statutory element to it. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is looking at a number of legislative options for how that should be taken forward. Once we decide on the legislative powers to ensure that the chair and the team will have the power to compel, we will report back to the House and the Committee with regard to the time frame.

We are working very closely with victims and survivors. Junior Minister Bell and I met victims and survivors last week, and we intend to keep in regular touch with them. They are very satisfied that we are doing all that we can to make sure that we get this right.

2.30 pm

Social Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1, 3 and 7 have been withdrawn.

Energy Costs

2. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development what analysis he has carried out of the impact that rising energy costs are having on the most vulnerable in our society. (AQO 944/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): In April this year, my Department launched its new fuel poverty strategy, which places significant emphasis on the partnership approach required to tackle fuel poverty and on the cross-departmental nature of the whole area of poverty. Professor Christine Liddell from the University of Ulster has also published the report, 'Defining Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland: A Preliminary Review'. That work was commissioned by my Department as a key element of our new fuel poverty strategy. The report states that of the 44% of households in fuel poverty, 13% are in severe fuel poverty. That equates to some 75,000 households that are spending at least 20% of their income on energy bills. To prioritise those most in need, it is proposed that that 13% of households become the primary focus of Northern Ireland's new fuel poverty strategy in the medium term.

I have commissioned Professor Liddell to undertake further research to help us identify households, and my officials are viewing how we should deliver energy efficiency measures to those households in future. I have recently announced an exciting and innovative pay-as-you-go option for oil heating for vulnerable households. A pilot scheme will begin early in the new year, and the technology could see significant savings for those who use drums rather than have oil delivered in larger quantities.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is the Department for Social Development (DSD) doing to help maximise incomes for vulnerable households?

Mr McCausland: As part of the 2011-12 benefit uptake programme, the Social Security Agency (SSA) is writing directly to 25,000 existing customers who may have additional benefit entitlement to offer them a full and confidential assessment. The SSA's Outreach to Older People campaign promotes a free phone benefits advice line. Anyone who contacts that number will receive a full benefits assessment, which includes information on warm homes, and also be offered further help if that is required. The advice line is being heavily promoted, and the Make the Call campaign began on 14 November and will run until March next year. To date, over 3,000 calls have been received. The SSA is also working with community and voluntary sector partners to test new ways of reaching those harder to engage who could have additional benefit entitlement. Those projects will run for 12 months, and evaluation will inform future benefit uptake programmes.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. What is he doing on the back of the Committee for Social Development's fuel poverty event in the Long Gallery, which could provide a longer-term strategy for dealing with fuel poverty?

Mr McCausland: I was speaking earlier today to the Committee Chairperson and the Committee Clerk. I understand that the report is being written up, and I look forward to receiving it.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he detail whether he intends to make a bid for additional resources from the social protection fund to tackle the growing rate of fuel poverty?

Mr McCausland: The social protection fund is under the remit of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and my Department has been working closely with it in that regard. I hope to hear an announcement in the near future.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. He has expressed a lot of sympathy for the problem and has highlighted the nature of it. When will he take effective action to deal with those who are in serious difficulty?

Mr McCausland: I do not know where the Member has been for the past while. There has been announcement after announcement about addressing fuel poverty. It is not a case of talking about it; it is a case of doing things. We have in place our warm homes scheme and our boiler replacement scheme. We have the ongoing improvements. The Member can shake his head as much as he wants. He can shake it until it falls off if he wants. The fact is that, when people are doing something and delivering, he should at least acknowledge that it is happening. Nodding your head in the corner of the room will not do much to address fuel poverty, but the actions that are being taken by my Department week after week are delivering.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Queen's Parade, Bangor: Regeneration

4. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress being made on the regeneration and development of Bangor town centre, and in particular, the Queen's Parade area. (AQO 946/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I visited Bangor in July to launch the Bangor town centre master plan, which identifies a range of regeneration projects that should be taken forward in the town centre over the next 15 years. North Down Borough Council has agreed to establish a project board comprising the main public and private sector stakeholders to oversee delivery. My Department will participate in the project board and consider relevant projects for funding from its regeneration budget. One such project is a proposed public realm improvement scheme for Abbey Street. Subject to the completion of positive project appraisal and the availability of the necessary budget cover, that project could start in 2013.

My Department and the developer are in the process of negotiating a development agreement for a major development on the site at the Queen's Parade area of Bangor town centre. That agreement will set out the nature of the development that is to be delivered and the timescale for implementation. I anticipate that the agreement will be signed in April or May 2012. Due to the scale and complexity of the project, it is estimated that it will take the developer between 18 months and 24 months to draw up detailed plans, secure planning permission and assemble the site. My Department has established a project board to manage the regeneration scheme. The board includes representatives of North Down Borough Council, Roads Service and the Planning Service. My Department has also

established a community engagement partnership to liaise with the local community throughout the entire process.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he indicate whether he is content that Karl Greenfarm Properties Limited is a suitable development partner given the perceived financial problems of Mar Properties Limited?

Mr McCausland: Three partners make up Karl Greenfarm Properties Limited: Karl Construction, which holds 50% of the shares, and Greenfarm Properties Limited and Mar Properties Limited, both of which hold 25% of the shares. The decision to appoint Karl Greenfarm Properties Limited as the preferred developer followed financial due diligence that concluded that the proposed scheme is viable and that the developer has the professional and financial capacity to deliver it. My Department is satisfied that that remains the case.

Mr Cree: Minister, have any moneys have been guaranteed for the scheme? What will the likely expenditure period be? You mentioned the overall scheme, but I am particularly interested in the seafront scheme.

Mr McCausland: Taking forward the proposals that are contained in the master plan will certainly require a significant financial commitment by the private sector and some investment by the public sector. Since the master plan proposes a 15-year programme of regeneration projects, it will run over a number of public funding cycles. It is not possible to commit or ring-fence funding for all the public sector projects in it at this time. However, my Department has included £2.5 million for a public realm scheme in its forward programme of works to be delivered between 2013 and 2015, subject to all approvals and funding being available.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Arbh fhéidir liom a fhiafraí den Aire tuairisc reatha a thabhairt dúinn ar scéim athnuachan na gcomharsanachtaí? I ask the Minister for an update on the neighbourhood renewal scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I believe that question is not relevant to the substantive question. Therefore, we will move on.

Mr Lunn: Approximately how many town centre regeneration schemes is the Department looking at? Can the Minister confirm that the Bangor scheme will not receive any priority over the others?

Mr McCausland: Perhaps I can satisfy the Member by saying that Lisburn's scheme is very much on the agenda. I will give him full details in writing of all the schemes, which are, indeed, spread right across the Province and are treated fairly and equitably. Nobody gets preferential treatment, but I assure him that I have not forgotten Lisburn.

Mr F McCann: In the last mandate, an inquiry into town centre regeneration was carried out and a number of recommendations came out of it. Where do those recommendations sit at the minute in respect of priority?

Mr McCausland: Over the last while, we have been very much driven forward by delivering the work that is under way right across the Province in quite a number of areas. Since coming into the Department, I have been going through all the different areas of the Department's work, from housing

to welfare reform, and so on. We are working through those areas consecutively and will be bringing forward a new and, I hope and believe, better approach to all of them. Town regeneration is one of the areas that we will be looking at, and I am happy to write to the Member with details of that.

Benefits: Make the Call

5. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Make the Call benefits uptake campaign. (AQO 947/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department, through the Social Security Agency, provides a wide range of services to make people aware of their entitlement to benefit, including outreach services, the production of specific publications, participation in local community-level promotional activity, use of the NI Direct website, an online benefits adviser service, and general assistance and information available through the network of local and centralised benefits offices.

Since 2005, specific actions have been undertaken annually as part of the benefits uptake programme. Activities included on an ongoing basis are, for example, direct invitations to existing customers offering a full and confidential benefits assessment, involvement of the independent advice sector, assistance with making a claim and a free phone benefits advice line. Those are only examples. That work has generated an additional £27.1 million in unclaimed benefit for older people since it began in 2005.

The 2011-12 benefit uptake programme consisted of four separate but complementary strands of work, whereby 25,000 existing customers, the majority of which were over 60, who may have additional benefit entitlement were written to directly to offer them a full and confidential benefits assessment. That assessment is provided by the independent advice sector.

There has been promotional outreach to older people through the Make the Call campaign, which has been extremely successful in identifying potential recipients of additional benefit. The Social Security Agency is also working with community and voluntary sector partners to test new and innovative ways of trying to reach out to those who have been more difficult to engage with in the past. A total of £375,000 from the innovation fund was allocated to seven projects to do just that.

The Make the Call campaign began on 14 November, and in the first two weeks there were over 3,000 calls. Over 2,500 callers availed themselves of a full benefit assessment. I am particularly encouraged to report that more than 40% of those calling the freephone number have had potential additional entitlements to benefits, services and support identified. I have also received some responses from individuals saying —

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

Mr McCausland: — "Thank you very much for the offer, but I have more than enough money. I am quite happy the way I am."

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Minister for his fulsome response and the recent launch of the benefit uptake campaign and the Make the Call campaign. Given the widespread view that the implications of welfare reform will be rather negative,

can the Minister advise us what strategy he has in mind for giving wider support to advice services, which may be even more necessary in the time ahead?

Mr McCausland: Support for advice services comes not only from my Department but from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment as well. As we move forward into welfare reform and all of its implications, the concern that every Member of the Assembly — at least, most Members — shares is that we need to be very conscious of the demands that will be placed on advice services.

2.45 pm

We are looking at regional infrastructure support, and the advice sector is one of the themes in that area. So, that will be very much to the fore of our thinking over the next while. It is important that we not only get the right structure but that we have enough funding to support it.

As the Member will be aware, we put in additional support in recent days for mortgage advice, as that is a very pertinent issue for folk at the moment.

Mr I McCrea: In his initial response, the Minister referred to the generation of £27.1 million of unclaimed benefit for older people. The Minister will no doubt also be aware that a lot more money could be claimed by many other people. Is he content that enough is being done to ensure that the people who are entitled to those benefits get them? Does he see the advantage of using organisations such as Access to Benefits to ensure that people get adequate benefits?

Mr McCausland: In the earlier part of my answer, I mentioned that certain groups are particularly difficult to reach. That is why we introduced this programme, and through it, we are working with the community and voluntary sector to test new ways to reach people. As we see the effectiveness of those new ways, we will certainly feed that into future planning for benefit advice.

Mr Copeland: For the second day in a row, I find myself in agreement with Ian McCrea, so there will be a similarity in what we say, for which I apologise. Does the Minister agree that, although figures for benefit that is claimed fraudulently quite rightly receive a fair degree of publicity, the value of benefit that is not claimed but lawfully entitled is liable to exceed the amount that a substantial proportion of people claim fraudulently?

Mr McCausland: I think that it is difficult to put an exact figure on, or even to make a guess about, the amount of benefit that is unclaimed. That figure is certainly very substantial, and we have an indication of the amount of money that has been gained for people through the advice services. I assure the Member that we are doing all that we can by using those new and innovative approaches to complement the ongoing regular, mainstream services. We are doing all that we can to reach out. I have been impressed by the feedback that is coming in. There is huge potential to draw in additional money, particularly for those who are most in need.

Mr P Ramsey: It is a good news story that so many older people in our community are receiving the benefits that they have been lacking for years. Would the Minister consider extending the campaign throughout Northern Ireland to other

vulnerable groups so that they can have the benefit of the Make the Call campaign?

Mr McCausland: The innovative approaches that we are adopting are focused on a number of specific sectors. We said to the community and voluntary sector, "You come back to us and tell us how you might do this". It was in response to that that we provided the funding to them. We will be in a much better position to see what can be done in the future when we get a proper evaluation and have actually seen at the end of the year how that has worked out. If there are gaps, they will certainly need to be considered.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing

6. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development when he expects the double glazing programme for Housing Executive homes to begin. (AQO 948/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I expect the double glazing programme to begin as soon as possible. The Housing Executive installs double glazing as part of its external cyclical maintenance programme. Extra funding of £2 million that was secured through the October monitoring round has enabled that activity to increase already. The Housing Executive is working to identify the additional properties that still require double glazing. Once that information is available, which is required by March 2012 under the draft Programme for Government, the Housing Executive will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing to all its homes by the end of 2015.

In the current financial year, the Housing Executive identified 18 schemes throughout Northern Ireland that will install double glazing to 2,700 properties. The Housing Executive has also completed external cyclical maintenance schemes to 3,650 dwellings during this financial year. Those schemes would have included the installation of double glazing where required.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his very welcome response. How confident is he that any additional moneys that have been reallocated in the October monitoring round and that may be reallocated in the February monitoring round can be spent before the end of the financial year?

Mr McCausland: The installation of double glazing is a matter of considerable public interest. It is of particular interest to tenants, but it is also of particular interest to the construction industry. It is important that the message be put out clearly that I do not anticipate, nor will I accept, any failure in that regard. It is absolutely imperative that the Housing Executive ensure that the £2 million that has already been allocated be spent in time and that it is, therefore, able to come back for the second tranche of £2 million to make up the total of £4 million. That is the position that I agreed with the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

That message will go out clearly. I will meet the chairman and the chief executive of the Housing Executive on Thursday 8 December. If there are issues that need to be addressed quickly, they will be discussed. The issue very much at the top of the agenda will be ensuring that all of the £4 million is able to be drawn down and spent. Companies out there in the construction industry are seeking work. Tenants are waiting for double glazing. We cannot consider, and I will not allow, any possibility of failure.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his efforts. It is a very good scheme and very much welcomed.

I want to ask the Minister a technical question. Will 25 mm vacuum double-glazing units be used? Double glazing in existing housing stock has only 12 mm units. I have been advised by a senior Housing Executive manager that they are not as effective as 25 mm vacuum units.

Mr McCausland: I have asked the Housing Executive to bring forward a programme of work. As I said, I will meet the chairman and the chief executive on Thursday. I am waiting to receive the programme of work as soon as is possible. I am sure that all technical details will be included in it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Social Housing and Social Deprivation

8. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister for Social Development how he intends to integrate social housing development into his Department's wider approach to addressing social deprivation. (AQO 950/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is responsible for both urban regeneration and housing. There is a strong correlation between areas of multiple deprivation and areas of concentrated social housing. The problems that characterise both are intertwined. I want regeneration and housing plans and resources to be better integrated in future.

Although housing alone cannot sustain communities, it can lay foundations. It plays an important role. However, for communities to survive, access to training and employment is equally essential. In spring 2012, I will introduce proposals for a new urban regeneration and community development policy framework, which will set out how all my Department's policies and programmes to address deprivation will be better co-ordinated in future.

I recognise that that has not always been the approach, which is why I have asked my officials and the Housing Executive to form a working group to look further at how best to integrate housing and regeneration. We are piloting that new approach already. I have also tasked my Department with bringing forward a new Northern Ireland housing strategy that draws together the many different strands of work. I intend to launch it early next year.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his response. Can he tell me why the working group was set up and how it will work in practice?

Mr McCausland: If Members want to see an example of blight that is caused by poor housing and the impact that it can have on a community, they need look no further than the lower Oldpark area in my constituency. Derelict and abandoned homes have severely blighted the local community. Colleagues from the Housing Executive, housing division and urban regeneration division are working with the local community to deliver a more holistic approach to tackling the deprivation and blight that was allowed to continue in that area for far too long. I hope that the approach that we are piloting in the lower Oldpark can be implemented in other areas.

One thing that I want to say in addition is that, in carrying out such work, it is important that the workmanship is of a very high standard. I want to work with communities not just to improve housing but to introduce a wider range of regeneration interventions that can increase employment and training opportunities. For example, in the Shankill area, the construction of 170 new homes is either under way or due to start and 2,718 existing homes are to be improved. That work represents an investment of approximately £37 million in housing in that area. Urban development grants of £1.5 million have helped to improve community facilities, and my Department will pump over £1.7 million into the Shankill area to support 37 full-time and 19 part-time posts in the local community. You have my undertaking that no community will be forgotten in this type of work.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party fully supports integrated housing across Northern Ireland. However, the Minister may be aware of the practice of trying to force social housing into established and settled private developments. Has the Minister and his Department learned any lessons to try to overcome those problems?

Mr McCausland: Mixed tenure housing is the best approach. We should not concentrate all social housing in one area, because that only brings together a huge concentration of disadvantage. Mixed tenure is a good thing. How it is handled is another matter, and it requires care, thought and sensitivity.

Housing Executive: Maintenance Contracts

9. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how contractors were assessed for suitability as part of the tender process to award maintenance contracts for the Housing Executive. (AQO 951/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and Northern Ireland public procurement policy determines how the Housing Executive decides on the suitability or otherwise of contractors by way of pre-qualification questionnaires. Those test the financial capacity and the technical and professional ability of contractors to carry out required works or services. The criteria for the selection of suitable tenderers may include, for example, construction line category value, annual turnover, experience, management structures, and health and safety procedures. Those criteria may be tested by way of a pass/fail mechanism or scored with relevant thresholds attached. Those contractors that are deemed suitable will then be invited to tender by the Housing Executive.

Mr Hilditch: Like other Members, concerns have been raised with me by constituents. Will the Minister tell the House how the Housing Executive monitors the quality of the work that is undertaken by contractors?

Mr McCausland: That is a very pertinent question, and it goes to the heart of the recent issue of maintenance contracts in the Housing Executive. We recently appointed ASM to undertake a forensic examination of Housing Executive response maintenance contracts, and I expect that report to be completed by June. It is vital that we get to the heart of how those contracts are managed, monitored and delivered.

There was an issue some time ago with one particular contractor, but I have received complaints — I am sure that

most MLAs have — from constituents about the problems that they are facing with other contractors. I still have reservations about the quality of some of the work that is being undertaken, particularly in light of the refurbishment of just four homes in lower Oldpark last month by a Housing Executive contractor. I mentioned that as an area that we are focusing on. The quality of the work that was initially undertaken was simply unacceptable, but more worryingly, it went under the radar of the Housing Executive until the local community invited my officials to see the homes for themselves. Although immediate work was undertaken to put right the many faults once my staff had identified them, that poor workmanship should never have been allowed to happen in the first place, and it should not have been left to the local community to inspect and report back after it had been allowed to happen.

Another example was brought to my attention yesterday of a house in another estate that was about to be handed over to a tenant. Officials told her that everything was well and that the house was in order to move into. However, photographs that were taken of the house yesterday show a heater in one room without a knob on it. I would have thought that it is a good idea to have knobs on heaters so that they can be switched on, but perhaps that does not occur to some Housing Executive contractors. There are a lot of questions still to be addressed about Housing Executive contractors.

Mr Swann: The Minister mentioned that some contractors had gone under the radar and said that they are being reviewed. The Housing Executive currently works with Egan contracts. Does the Minister have any intention of reviewing how those contracts are awarded? If contractors are managing their own contracts and assessing their own work, that will allow them to slip under the radar.

3.00 pm

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has completed an evaluation process for the selection stage to procure new contractors. It has selected the companies that will proceed to tender and hopes to issue tender documents this week, for return by 16 January 2012. I can assure the Member that major changes have been made to the current tendering process. A gateway review health check late last year contained 14 recommendations in relation to procurement and contract management, and, as a result, the Housing Executive set up a project team to put in place the health check recommendations. Those have been incorporated into the procurement strategy and the tendering process that is now under way. A further health check was completed in October 2011, confirming that the procurement process had made considerable progress. It is considered that that will proceed to a successful completion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends questions to the Minister for Social Development. I ask Members who wish to leave the Chamber at this stage to do so quietly. Members should keep conversations in the Chamber to a minimum and not distract other Members who are trying to listen.

Assembly Commission

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 3 and 11 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Engagement and Outreach: East Londonderry

1. **Mr McClarty** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the number and type of engagements and outreach initiatives that have been undertaken with organisations that are based in East Londonderry, since May 2011. (AQO 958/11-15)

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank David McClarty for his question, which seeks information on engagements and outreach initiatives that the Assembly has undertaken in his constituency. David may refer to it differently; I refer to it as East Derry, but you say “tomato” and I say “tomayto”.

Between May 2011 and November 2011, three post-primary schools from the Member’s constituency took part in the education programme here at Parliament Buildings. Those were Coleraine High School; Dominican College, Portstewart; and Loreto College, which I understand is in Coleraine as well. In June 2011, the Assembly’s education service delivered an education outreach programme to Coleraine College.

In October 2011, the education service organised an education outreach programme for five school councils from the Roe Valley learning community: Limavady Grammar School, Limavady High School, Rossmar Special School, St Mary’s High School and St Patrick’s College. That external programme was followed up by an event in the Senate Chamber on Friday 18 November 2011 at which school councils and local MLAs took part in an inter-school council meeting.

There were other events that took place involving the Member’s constituency. Four community outreach events have included attendees and organisations that identified themselves as being from East Derry. Thirty-seven events have taken place in Parliament Buildings involving local groups, and four events run by the Assembly and Business Trust since May 2011 have been attended by local organisations or businesses from the Member’s area. I know that the Member has a strong and positive attitude to engagement, for which I commend him.

Mr McClarty: I thank the “tomayto” — sorry, the Member — for his answer. Has the Assembly Commission explored any new initiatives for future engagements that will positively promote the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Mr McElduff: I thank Mr McClarty for his supplementary question. There needs to be increased take-up of the existing initiatives and opportunities. We have outlined that, in the Member’s constituency, quite a lot has happened, much of which is down to the MLAs from that constituency who are positively engaging and promoting those opportunities. If the Member has any particular suggestions for new and innovative ways of engaging with the Assembly, the Commission will, obviously, want to hear about them. I encourage individual Members to speak directly to me or Gareth McGrath, the director with responsibility for information and outreach, if there are particular suggestions that we would want to take on board.

Mr Dallat: I seize this opportunity to pay tribute to the education and outreach programme. I encourage other MLAs to become involved because, like David McClarty, I have been involved. Those young people from Coleraine and Limavady —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr Dallat: The question is: how can the Commission encourage greater activity that might impress upon the Members of this Assembly how to really move forward?

Mr McElduff: I thank Mr Dallat for his question. Individual Assembly Members could involve themselves more in assisting businesses and community organisations to understand the work of the Assembly, particularly with the Assembly and Business Trust, which has organised a number of breakfast initiatives and other events, including visits to Brussels to understand the European system. I encourage the message of helping business to understand the Assembly and the Assembly to understand business, and each and every one of us, as MLAs, should become involved in that type of work in our constituency. However, I also thank Mr Dallat for his proactive role in this matter.

Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

2. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. (AQO 959/11-15)

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This question falls to me as well, given that I have the information and outreach portfolio in the team of commissioners. I thank Mrs Dobson for her question. Between March 2010 and March 2011, a panel of young people assisted by the Assembly's education service developed proposals for a Youth Assembly. The Youth Panel gathered the views of young people and other interested organisations and carried out research into other youth parliaments, and it was supported in that work by the Assembly's Research and Information Service. The Youth Panel activities included residential meetings, regional workshops with young people and research visits to London, Dublin and Edinburgh, as well as an online survey. The Youth Panel's proposal for a Youth Assembly was presented to the Commission in March this year, and the Commission agreed in principle to the establishment of the Youth Assembly and to a public consultation on the Youth Panel's proposals. That consultation took place between May and September, and the consultation responses are being considered.

Mrs Dobson: I am glad to hear that plans are moving quickly, and I reiterate my party's strong support for the creation of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. Does the Assembly commissioner agree with me that Youth Assembly members have the potential to become ambassadors for the schools, young people and youth groups across their constituencies?

Mr McElduff: I thank Mrs Dobson for her supplementary question, and I know that she, as a Member, is a champion of youth engagement. The idea of a young person's assembly will allow the Assembly to demonstrate its commitment to engaging with young people and to giving them a voice. It offers a practical way of listening to their views and encouraging them to participate in the democratic process. It is hoped that the Youth Assembly can be formally established in spring 2012. So, in a few months' time, we want it to become live in that form.

Mr I McCrea: As someone who is happy to be a younger MLA and as a father of a teenager, I am more than aware of the issues that young people have and of their ability

to form opinions. Will the Commission continue to engage with the youth parliament and ensure that the issues that it brings forward are listened to and, if necessary, put into practice?

Mr McElduff: I thank Mr McCrea for his question. In its early stages, real work and real delivery is expected of the Youth Assembly. For example, in early 2012, it will be asked to select, organise and conduct two campaigns, respond to a minimum of two consultations and work with Assembly Committees as required. There is a real enthusiasm on the part of the Assembly Commission to develop that in a way that will work. It will carry a cost initially, but we hope that the cost will dramatically decrease in successive years once it has been formally established.

Mr Byrne: I thank Mr McElduff for his answers. Can Barry outline whether there are any proposals on further connection and interaction with youth councils, as we have in Omagh and Strabane?

Mr McElduff: I am aware of Mr Byrne's strong support for youth councils, particularly in the Western Education and Library Board area, which covers west Tyrone, including Omagh and Strabane. Part of the process for arriving at the Youth Panel involved engagement with the youth councils, and the Youth Panel remains in situ, effectively advising on the formation of the Youth Assembly. One young man from the Omagh area, Matthew Garrity, came from a youth council background and found himself a member of the panel. As they say around here, all politics is local, Mr Byrne.

Mr McCarthy: Commissioner McElduff, we have a Youth Assembly and an assembly for senior citizens or elderly people. Has the Commission any plans to introduce an assembly for middle-aged people?

Mr McElduff: Apart from that, I hope that Kieran is keeping well. I am a supporter of the Youth Assembly, and the question is principally about that. Participatory democracy is essentially a good thing. It would be a very bad thing if we were to expect people to elect us and leave it totally to us for the ensuing four or five years. You make an interesting suggestion, which I am inclined to dismiss. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not sure whether the Member was trying to reposition himself in a different category. Question 3 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Assembly: Staffing

4. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on how the outcome of the comprehensive spending review is impacting on staff numbers. (AQO 961/11-15)

Mr McDevitt: I ask that on an exceptionally serious note, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his question. In the context of the comprehensive spending review, the Assembly Commission is committed to maintaining an appropriate level of service to Members while continuing to exercise prudent financial management. A reduction in staff numbers over the four-year period of the comprehensive spending review is planned, and it is anticipated that that reduction will be achieved through the control of vacancies and through natural wastage. At present, a freeze on external recruitment is in place. As of 1 April 2011, the number of

staff in post in the Assembly secretariat was 409.5 full time equivalents. As of 1 December, that number has been reduced to 397.1 — I am not quite sure who the 0.1 is. That includes 4.3 full time equivalent agency staff and three on attachment from other organisations.

Mr McDevitt: Given the importance of continuing to properly resource the House, will Mr Weir outline what he expects to be the staffing requirement for the Assembly during the current mandate?

Mr Weir: We have a plan rolled out for the reduction of staff until April 2014, which will cover the current comprehensive spending review. It aims to reach 375 full time equivalent staff as the final position. I suspect that the challenges will get a bit harder towards the end of the programme, but we are ahead of target. We had aimed to be at the level of 400 full time equivalent staff by April 2012, at 390 by April 2013 and reaching the figure of 375 by April 2014. As the Member can see, we are slightly ahead of target.

Mr Allister: With the Assembly staff complement being reduced, is there any sense of embarrassment that the Assembly still continues at its bloated level of 108 Members? Is there any sense of embarrassment that, whilst many staff are subject to a pay freeze, there are those who are currently considering an increase for Members?

3.15 pm

Mr Weir: With respect, the Assembly Commission's role is to look at the staff complement. So it is probably inappropriate for me to comment on much of what the Member has said. The Assembly took a view, which I think was the right view, that Members' terms and conditions — their pay, office costs, for example, and all related issues — were not appropriate for this House to decide on. I challenge any Member to disagree with that. It is not for this House to set its own terms and conditions for its own Members. Therefore, an independent panel was set up as a result of legislation that went through the House. That panel is yet to report, so any indication of the implications on Members' pay and related issues is pure speculation at this stage.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will there be compulsory redundancies in securing the target of reducing the staff complement to 375?

Mr Weir: No. We are committed to there not being any compulsory redundancies. As I indicated, we are looking to meet those through control of vacancies and natural wastage. The figures would seem to suggest that we are on target to do that. Clearly, the Assembly Commission is limited in its remit and budget, so we have a limited range of options. If we are not able to make targets, we would then have to look at a degree of reduction in other activities in the Assembly and to try to be as efficient as possible in other budget lines. That is something the Assembly Commission is already embracing. However, if we were unable to meet those targets, we would have to dig deeper into that side of it to meet them.

Ormiston House, Belfast

5. **Mr Swann** asked the Assembly Commission to provide an update on the sale of Ormiston House, Belfast. (AQO 962/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, Ormiston House has been a hot potato for some time. However, it has been for sale on the open market since January 2011 and there has been a recent healthy interest in the site for a wide range of uses. The current highest bid is within the range indicated by market sounding advice, carried out in advance of the sale. The Assembly Commission is simultaneously pursuing planning permission for limited development of the site and a decision on that proposal is expected early in the new year.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his answer. Considering that Ormiston House is costing us £400 a day in maintenance, security and all the rest of it, how soon can you bring forward some of those proposals?

Mr P Ramsey: Ormiston House has been on the agenda at Assembly Commission meetings over the past two years that I have been a member of the Commission. There has been much more interest in the site, so, hopefully, within a short period of time, we can conclude business on it. The Member is quite right: the maintenance costs and security on the site alone is estimated at £130,000 a year. If we can get that sale activated, there would be accrued savings. Certainly, it is the desire of the Assembly Commission to conclude business, hopefully very soon.

Committee for Social Development: Fuel Poverty Event

6. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Assembly Commission how many people attended the fuel poverty event hosted by the Committee for Social Development in the Long Gallery on Wednesday 16 November 2011, and what was the cost of the event. (AQO 963/11-15)

Mr Cree: The fuel poverty event of 16 November, hosted by the Committee for Social Development, was an innovative approach to the consideration of the pressing issue of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. Stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as non-governmental organisations, joined with officials from the eight Departments represented on the interdepartmental group on fuel poverty, which is chaired by the Minister for Social Development, to clarify the progress made in addressing fuel poverty in Northern Ireland, and to identify additional innovative solutions.

In recognition of the importance of that problem, the discussions at each table were hosted by a representative of the eight Statutory Committees, whose Departments are represented on that interdepartmental group on fuel poverty. That included the seven Chairs of the seven Committees. I believe that it was the first event of its kind convened by a Committee of this Assembly to address a cross-departmental issue on a cross-Committee basis.

The event attracted significant interest from stakeholders, with 32 organisations representing 53 stakeholders. In addition, the eight Departments referred to were represented by 14 officials. Twelve MLAs attended, including representatives of the Statutory Committees, and each one hosted one of the tables. Four members came from the Committee for Social Development. In addition, 15 members of the Assembly secretariat were present for all or part of the meeting. In total, 94 people attended the event, which cost £895.86p.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for his very accurate answer about the cost. Is the Commission aware of any positive outcomes from this very welcome event, given the weather outside and the immediate issue of fuel poverty, which a lot of people in this community are facing?

Mr Cree: Thank you for that. There were good outcomes. The event focused on solutions to fuel poverty. This issue spans the eight Departments that I referred to. The cross-Committee approach was novel and, coupled with the representation, it was a truly collaborative event, where the collaboration itself was an achievement. However, it was not meant to be a talking shop, and a report based on the solution to fuel poverty, proposed and agreed at the event by the stakeholders, is being prepared and will be considered by the Social Development Committee at a future meeting.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Member has answered my question. I was going to ask what was achieved by the event, but that has been answered.

Mr Copeland: I had hoped, and I now know, that there was not a sceptical motive behind the question. I attended the meeting and want to stress how useful, interesting and beneficial it was. Will the Commission detail how it encourages events in Parliament Buildings that bring together various stakeholders?

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for the question. As I said, this was innovative in the sense that it was the first of its kind. It was a success on this occasion, which should encourage other events in other areas.

In addition, a video was produced in-house, which provides information on the extent of the fuel poverty problem in Northern Ireland and explains where people can get advice on dealing with fuel poverty. That has been circulated to a number of organisations, and it is also on the website.

Assembly: European Engagement Strategy

7. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Assembly Commission to outline how the European engagement strategy is progressing. (AQO 964/11-15)

Mr Cree: Towards the end of the last mandate, the Commission agreed a draft strategy for making sure that the Assembly, in carrying out its work, is fully aware of European issues. Therefore, it instructed that a member of the secretariat should be assigned full-time to carry out that important work. Recruitment for the European scrutiny co-ordinator post has concluded and an appointment is imminent. Among other duties, that officer will look at how the Assembly can influence the formation of policy.

In the meantime, the focus on European issues has been maintained in a number of different ways. A comprehensive training programme has been delivered to Clerks, researchers and Hansard staff to ensure that available information from Europe is given to Members and to the Committees that need it. Although the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) takes the lead in respect of the scrutiny of European issues, other Statutory Committees have a clear role. They need to support and scrutinise how and when their Departments become aware of European issues.

Clerks of Statutory Committees have, therefore, been asked to highlight European scrutiny in drawing up the forward work plans for their Committees' consideration. Members will also be aware that the OFMDFM Committee has established an advisory panel to help scrutinise departmental engagement with EU issues and to better inform debate and discussion in the Assembly. The panel consists of members of the OFMDFM Committee as well as European representatives on other Statutory Committees, with stakeholders becoming involved when issues under consideration are relevant to them. The panel met yesterday to discuss a variety of significant European issues, including the proposed reform of the common agricultural policy, the common fisheries policy and EU Commission proposals around the cohesion fund.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an fhreagra sin. Are there any plans for the official appointed by the Assembly to liaise with existing Northern Ireland representatives in Brussels?

Mr Cree: Yes; as I said, we will have that person in place shortly. Their brief will be to make themselves aware of all that is happening. The staff member will be assigned full-time to carry out this important work. Recruitment of the co-ordinator has, as I said, concluded. They will help to prepare a business case for handling the substantial costs involved in the project, regardless of whether they are here part time or in Brussels part time or whatever, and to look at whether we need to have a full-time officer in Brussels. The costs involved are quite significant. The groundwork and business case will have to be developed first.

Parliament Buildings: Energy Consumption

8. **Mr Agnew** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the total energy consumption of Parliament Buildings in the last financial year. (AQO 965/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member from North Down for his question. The Assembly Commission has developed an environmental management scheme, which gained ISO accreditation in September this year. To achieve such recognition, the Assembly has been working hard to continually improve environmental performance and has set challenging objectives and targets in relation to energy efficiency. Staff engagement has been key to driving forward a reduction in energy consumption. Mandatory awareness sessions were completed for staff and building users. Most recently, we enlisted staff volunteers from across the building to act as environmental champions. Clearly, champions have a key role to play in raising colleagues' awareness of environmental issues and, ultimately, in helping to increase energy efficiency in Parliament Buildings.

Mr Agnew: I thank Mr Ramsey for his response. Obviously, as well as being environmentally beneficial, energy efficiency reduces costs. Is there any estimate of the reduction in costs due to energy efficiency?

Mr P Ramsey: In 2009, a detailed review of energy consumption in the previous four years — covering 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 and to the then present — was undertaken to establish the total energy consumption, energy costs and CO₂ emissions of Parliament Buildings. The data was used to help to identify measures to reduce

energy consumption, such as increasing staff awareness of energy consumption, as I said previously.

I will give details of the consumption over the past number of years. For example, in 2008, we used 5,655,120 kilowatt-hours at a cost of £402,709. From April 2009 to March 2010, we used almost 5,500,000 kilowatt-hours at a cost of almost £280,000. From April 2010 to March 2011, the total energy consumption reduced again, to below 5,500,000 kilowatt-hours, at a cost of £100 shy of £300,000.

Public Attitude Survey

9. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the measures it has taken to address the key findings of the 2009 Public Attitude Survey. (AQO 966/11-15)

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Public Attitude Survey concluded that the Assembly needs to further improve its engagement with a number of specific groups, including 16- to 24-year-olds, women and people from lower and middle income family backgrounds. The Assembly Commission's engagement strategy has been implemented to improve engagement with those key groups. I will outline some of the measures taken.

Between January 2009 and November 2011, the education service delivered programmes to almost 48,000 participants from almost 1,700 groups. The education service launched the Outreach to Schools programme in 2010. To date, more than 40 schools have taken part in the programme. That initiative is a particularly good example of outreach activity. In addition to the standard education programmes, 12 events were held specifically to target younger people, including care experienced young people. Almost 400 young people attended those events. A whole range of other initiatives has been developed to deal with the specific groups identified, but I do not think that time allows me to go into that today.

3.30 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I thank Mr McElduff for his answer. Will he give an assessment of the negative impact in the perceptions of those key groups due to the lack of legislation since the Assembly elections in May, which was a long time ago?

Mr McElduff: The Member knows fine well — at least he ought to know, which is what David Trimble used to say around here — that this is a matter for the Executive rather than the Assembly Commission.

Private Members' Business

Hydraulic Fracturing

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly believes that a moratorium should be placed on the onshore and offshore exploration, development and production of shale gas by withdrawing licences for hydraulic fracturing (fracking), at least until the publication of a detailed environmental impact assessment into the practice; notes that hydraulic fracturing can put local water sources at risk of contamination; further notes that, amongst a variety of adverse environmental impacts, the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts, which put both workers and local communities at risk; considers that the production of hard-to-reach fossil fuels is not compatible with efforts to achieve carbon reduction targets; and urges the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give greater support to the generation of energy from renewable sources instead. — [Ms Lo.]

Mr Hamilton: I had not expected to be called, but I will do my best to whip myself up into a frenzy after the two-hour break in the debate. It is sometimes difficult for Members to be humble and accept that there are things that we do not know. I have sometimes exhibited the characteristics of that problem, as have others. Part of the problem in the debate is that a lot of people have been speaking on this difficult, complex issue as if they were world authorities, when it is clear from their contributions that they are not. Some people should accept the fact that they are not experts or authorities on the subject.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

My party and I support a precautionary approach precisely because we do not know everything about fracking, hydraulic fracturing or whatever one wants to call it. Everyone should be able to get behind such a precautionary approach, which is exactly what the Department has been bringing forward. If the hyperbole and partisan point scoring were taken out of some earlier contributions, the message would be that everyone wants a precautionary approach. Although the debate has been divided, we can all unite behind that thought.

The motion is flawed because everybody subscribes to a precautionary approach and because of the issue of licences. Whatever about the legal and cost ramifications should the Minister withdraw what licences there are, there are no licences for hydraulic fracturing in place at present. As I understand it — I stand to be corrected if I am inaccurate — there are licences for geographical mapping exercises, which could lead to drilling at a later stage. If we get to that stage, my understanding is that planning permission and an environmental impact assessment will be required.

This is not a done deal that is definitely going to happen; there are huge processes to go through. As other Members pointed out, we have a fairly strict environmental regime here in comparison with other places in which fracking is already happening. Scare stories from those places have already been mentioned today. It is little wonder that there is concern in the community about what fracking involves and that people are scared of what might happen, given the hysteria that has been whipped up in the Chamber today.

If I had never heard about the issue or had not done any research, the words of some Members would leave me feeling deeply concerned. What we heard today is in no way a balanced argument. It does not take into account the fact that a precautionary approach is being taken.

There is also the question of whether we should do this sort of thing on principle. I find it confusing that there is a belief that we can suddenly give up our virtual dependence on fossil fuels for energy and move to some sort of renewable Utopia. People who believe that most countries will not depend on fossil fuels as part of their energy mix in the short to medium term are kidding themselves. Rather than looking for alternative sources for fossil fuels and other forms of energy, people argue that security of supply does not matter. They say that it does not matter whether you are at the end of a pipeline, that you can be held hostage by a madman in the Middle East or that a Russian oligarch can turn off the tap or put up the prices. People here are encouraging us to do that.

What maddens me even more is that it is not just this issue. There is a problem with all the other alternative energy sources as well, according to some of the people who brought the motion forward. If it is wind energy, they do not want the wind turbines in certain places. If it is wave power, they want somebody put on seal watch to ensure that seals are not massacred in any way. If it is energy from waste, they are against that as well. I do not even want to touch on nuclear power, not least because I do not have the time to do it. It seems to be that, with every single alternative energy source that is put forward, the very people who would preach to us about moving away from fossil fuels are against it.

A cautious steady approach is what the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is putting forward. I listened to the SDLP Members speaking about opposing it as well. I do not know whether they do not have confidence in the planning system, they do not have confidence in the planning officials, or they simply do not have confidence in their own planning Minister. That Minister will play a key role in the process, but I would not be surprised if they do not have confidence in him, given what we have seen played out in the media in recent months. A cautious steady approach, the very approach that the Minister and the Department are taking forward —

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

Mr Hamilton: — is exactly what we should all be united around today.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Hamilton: The motion is a silly one, intended only to divide rather than to accept the facts of the situation.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In rising on behalf of my party to support the motion, I thank Ms Lo for introducing the motion earlier. I realise that a lot of feelings run through every community. The reason I say that is that I represented a community for 16 years, and I am glad that Mr Frew mentioned it. Although we seek to rationalise such things and present details around them, deep-seated feelings run through communities, as in the area that I represented, where there was lignite open-cast mining. I have heard the arguments from the other side

about fuels, but, ultimately, we must take cognisance of and listen to the communities that it is happening in, and treat them with the respect and sensitivity required.

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I note the comments about listening to the community and taking on its concerns. I absolutely agree that we should do that, but is it not also incumbent on those political representatives not to exploit communities' fears to score political points against people but to be informed about the issue and then provide leadership to those communities so that hysteria is not whipped up unnecessarily?

Mr McGlone: I could not disagree with that at all. In fact, I am glad that the motion has been brought before us today because that is precisely the sort of thing that we wish to avoid through the debate. We want to make it informed, so as to make people aware, inside the House and outside it, of how the process works.

Over a number of years, we have sought to look at fossil fuels. I have heard the arguments from the other side of the Chamber. The development of more efficient mining technology has resulted in a rash of applications by private companies for a licence to use, in this case, hydraulic fracturing, commonly referred to as fracking, in the extraction of previously hard-to-reach and, consequently, unprofitable shale gas. I have to put it on record that I do not oppose private companies making a profit, but the Assembly has a duty to ensure that the pursuit of short-term private profit does not come at any long-term public cost. I will expand on that later.

We now know that the European Commission has commenced three major studies in response to concerns about environmental, social and health problems that may arise as a result of the process. Those studies can help to allay fears in the community, and I would like to hear from the Minister about the recognition of that by her Department and other Departments, because I am also aware that other Departments will play a role in the process as it works its way through. It is very important that Departments send out a message to communities that their interests are also being considered.

I spoke to a gentleman here today from Pennsylvania in the United States who lived quite close to one of those mining areas where fracking had been taking place. He was deeply concerned. Indeed, the reason he was here today was to highlight those concerns to Members involved in the debate. I thank him for being here with us.

There are issues around what are referred to as —

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr Hamilton already referred to the inaccuracy of the motion, which states that: "the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts".

We know that all drilling can cause blowouts. Indeed, the very fact that fracturing is singled out gives cause for concern. When hydraulic fracturing takes place, the gas is at a much lower pressure than in conventional oil and gas drilling, in which such events are rare. The main reason is that shale gas is typically at a much lower pressure than that produced in conventional gas drilling.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for his intervention, which was more of a speech than an intervention. He will appreciate the concern about the issues that arise from hydraulic fracturing. Millions of gallons of water are used in the process of hydraulic fracturing, hence the need for an environmental impact assessment. Up to 40% of that water, together with the chemicals added by the industry, namely the heavy metals, salt and volatile petroleum compounds, will potentially come back into the water system as a blowback. If there is any sort of seismic shift as a consequence of, or simultaneous to, that fracking process and it permeates the underground or overground waterways, we will have to give that serious and major consideration.

Mr Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr McGlone: There are 500 chemicals commonly used in the process of hydraulic fracturing. There has to be a requirement on the industry to declare what those chemicals are —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McGlone: — and for us to hear what those are.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Today's debate offers me an excellent opportunity to clarify a number of issues surrounding the process of exploration for shale gas and to set the record straight on a number of allegations that have been made today, all of which are incorrect. It is the role of responsible Ministers to seek to take full advantage of any indigenous natural resources that Northern Ireland has and to support those who are willing to invest not inconsiderable sums of money in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, I take very seriously the many concerns that have been raised about the potential risks of trying to exploit potential oil and gas reserves here. Those concerns are genuine for the most part. I appreciate that the many people who have written to me or e-mailed me about the issue have deeply held views.

Let me make one or two things abundantly clear at the outset. The premise of the motion is fundamentally flawed. There is no licence for fracking in Northern Ireland. No hydraulic fracking licence has been issued. I do not know how many more ways I can say that. Today, Members in the Chamber and, indeed, the motion asked me to withdraw licences for hydraulic fracking. There are no licences for hydraulic fracking. Indeed, no one in Northern Ireland has a licence to extract oil or gas by any method.

My Department has issued licences to four companies in three counties in Northern Ireland, which permit them to explore for oil and gas. It is important to emphasise that, should those explorations prove fruitful and lead to a wish to go further and try to extract the valuable commodity, the necessary application for drilling and developing oil or gas will be subject to the full rigour of the planning system and associated environmental impact assessment processes. To respond to Mr McGlone's point: DETI and other regulators, notably the Department of the Environment (DOE), will undertake detailed scrutiny of any proposals in the context of the rigorous international engineering protocols that are emerging. That point was made clear to me by Ms Lo outside the Chamber as well. We will take into account all the international engineering protocols that are now emerging.

3.45 pm

So, no fracking licences have been issued by my Department, and therefore —

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for giving way. As I said outside the Chamber, within the planning policy framework, do you think that we have the competence in DOE to have a full, rigorous and independent impact assessment?

Mrs Foster: Obviously, that is a matter for my colleague in DOE, but if he does not have the competence internally, he will have to look outside of DOE for that international competence. Under European regulations, we will have to carry out an environmental impact assessment that satisfies the European Commission. Therefore, the rigorous international engineering protocols will have to be met and dealt with.

The licence to explore for shale gas which has been issued in County Fermanagh — that seems to be the area that people are looking at most closely — does not permit the operator to do anything more than undertake desk studies and similar preparatory work. Construction works, deep drilling, fracking and similar major activities must and will be subject to planning and many other safeguards. I would not have that any other way.

We can hardly impose a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, because no permit has yet been issued, and it is unlikely that an application will come to the Department for at least another 12 to 18 months. During that period, we will reap the benefit of several in-depth scientific and engineering studies currently in progress, notably in the United States.

When Members listen to the debate and look at the Hansard report for today, they will find that we are dancing on the head of a pin. We all want to see environmental impact assessments carried out in respect of fracking. We all want to see that the regulations that have been put in place in Northern Ireland are carried out fully and competently, and I would not have that any other way in County Fermanagh for the obvious reason.

Developing a more diverse, sustainable and secure heating market is, however, a key priority for my Department. Northern Ireland, as we hear many times in the Chamber, is overly dependent on home heating oil and that leaves consumers vulnerable to price fluctuations beyond our control and has a direct impact on levels of fuel poverty. Moving from our current dependence on fossil fuels and maximising our renewable resources in a cost-competitive way is, of course, a challenge, but a move to renewables will bring many benefits. Renewables can be a key player in creating the investment, exports and jobs that the Northern Ireland economy needs, and Members referred to that today. Renewable energy is no longer a fringe industry but very much a part of the mainstream, and we should look to shale gas to be the same. Not only might domestic shale gas production help to provide energy independence, it could also play a significant role in job creation.

I have read Bill Clinton's new book, 'Back to Work: Why We Need Smart Government for a Strong Economy', in which he says clearly that, as we develop other sources of clean power, we should use natural gas as a bridge fuel. It is the cleanest fossil fuel — more than 50% cleaner than coal in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, 25% cleaner than oil when used

in transportation and only one fourth as expensive. Bill Clinton sees it as one of the ways to put America back to work. People can look up that reference in his book.

Environmental concerns can and have been raised about all forms of energy production, and Mr Hamilton referred to that. However, we are all aware of the robust planning processes that are in place to protect the natural environment and those same measures will apply to shale gas extraction and the fracking process. Those operations will be regulated under a wide range of petroleum, environmental protection, pollution prevention, planning and health and safety legislation.

I firmly believe that Northern Ireland needs to explore the potential that shale gas offers. Even to consider imposing a moratorium at this early stage would reek of a missed opportunity. That view is reinforced by the findings of a recent United Kingdom study carried out by the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change. The Committee took evidence from a range of scientific, industrial and environmental organisations and concluded that:

"There is no evidence that the hydraulic fracturing process poses any risk to underground water aquifers provided that the well-casing is intact before the process commences."

Moreover, the environmental and climate risks posed by shale gas need to be balanced against its potential contribution to energy security. On balance, we feel that there should not be a moratorium on the use of hydraulic fracturing in the exploitation of the UK's hydrocarbon resources, including unconventional resources such as shale gas.

Members should look beyond the negative headlines from the United States — and I accept that there are many — and be mindful of the fact that more than 50,000 shale gas wells have been successfully developed in the United States, and that that source of gas now provides 20% to 30% of US domestic gas supply.

The well-publicised instances of water pollution arising from fracking operations in the United States undoubtedly resulted from poorly engineered wells constructed and operated within a fragmented and weak regulatory regime. Nobody can say that Northern Ireland has such a regime; it has a very strong regulatory regime. Indeed, the regulatory authorities would have oversight and control of all drilling operations.

Members also voiced their concern that fracking can put local water resources at risk of contamination, despite the fact that fracking was used in County Fermanagh in the early 2000s and there were no huge problems, even though we did not have as much regulation at that time. Therefore, let me clearly state my confidence in the extensive regulations governing this area to ensure that the operation can be safely managed. All the processes will require consents from the Department of the Environment and will be monitored in practice. The operation in County Fermanagh — Tamboran Resources — plans to undertake the fracking process without using chemicals, thus further mitigating any risk of contamination.

Mr Agnew said that it uses chemicals in other areas. However, it uses other chemicals, as, indeed, do other

companies, in ordinary drilling processes, but it does not use chemicals in this fracturing process.

In Northern Ireland, perhaps even more than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, we benefit from a regulatory regime run by central government, where the lines of communication are open and easy. My Department has established a regulators' forum, which brings together representatives from DETI, DOE, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Health and Safety Executive, together with officials from Northern Ireland Water. The group is collating existing regulations, monitoring developments, noting gaps in legislation, and thus compiling an integrated process to regulate those new engineering processes well before they begin.

We also enjoy considerable support from our colleagues in the Department of Energy and Climate Change in Great Britain, which has been controlling and monitoring oil and gas exploration in Great Britain for decades. Indeed, the United Kingdom has always been a world leader in energy development, and all that experience is at our disposal.

Members also raised the issue of possible well blowouts, which, of course, is a very serious concern. However, I must point out — I think that the point was made by Mr Newton, who was called the Minister; I can understand why, as he was very well informed — that almost all blowouts occur in conventional exploration where gas and oil are at high pressure in a geological trap. That is not the case in shale gas wells, where gas flows slowly to the surface for collection, so the high pressures of conventional exploration are not developed. Blowouts from fracked wells have been recorded, but they are extremely rare. Again, it is a matter that will be assessed at the planning stage and covered in detail by operating protocols.

Turning to the question of the carbon footprint of shale gas development, the Department of Energy and Climate Change has said that it expects the carbon footprint for shale gas to be similar to other onshore natural gas fields. Shale gas provides a valuable opportunity for increasing the security of energy supply and stabilising gas supplies over the medium term, during which time we shall reduce the overall energy carbon footprint by increasing the proportion of renewables and promoting carbon capture and storage.

I am aware of the argument that developing shale gas may defer the development of renewables. However, any local shale gas production should substitute for necessary imported coal, oil and gas rather than increase the percentage of fossil fuels in Northern Ireland's energy supply. Therefore, rather than have an impact on the slowing-down of renewables, it would, in fact, displace coal, oil and gas.

I could go through in some detail my commitment to renewables, which, I understand, is proposed in the last part of the motion. I have set out that commitment on many occasions in the House during debates on the strategic energy framework, so I do not believe that there is a necessity to do so again, save to say that, when all the initiatives are taken together, I suspect that there is no other area in the United Kingdom the size of Northern Ireland or with its population that can boast such a diversity of renewables under development.

To conclude, I ask Members to face some stark facts.

Mr Allister: I have been listening carefully to the Minister and to the debate. She has provided some useful clarification on a number of issues that were raised. Can she further clarify a couple of things? First, the Minister said that the present licence does not permit for any drilling. One of her colleagues referred to it as a “desktop exercise”. Is there not even, within the licence, permission for exploratory drilling? Secondly, what are the criteria by which the current licence was judged? Did it have any test to pass? What are the criteria that must be met before you get a licence such as this? Can the Minister explain that?

Mrs Foster: The licence was granted after a competitive process, which was carried out in a legislative way in consultation with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in London. A panel was set up comprising officials in DETI and officials in DECC. They set up a procedure, and that is how the process was carried out. The process has been set out in some detail to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I am happy for the Member to see the process and to send him a copy of it so that he is informed in that regard.

I will move now to the drilling. Shallow boreholes can be drilled to take rock samples, but drilling down into the substructure to try to get gas out is not allowed. Drilling can be done merely to look at the rock structure at the shallow boreholes. Anything else is subject to permission from DETI. Permission must be given by DETI to drill the shallow boreholes as well. It is not a full licence, but permission from DETI is needed.

I will finish by saying, yet again, that there are no licences for fracking at present. If applications come in for licences for fracking, they will go through the whole panoply of regulatory procedures that will happen.

I hope that I have answered some of the questions that have been raised today, because there has been a lot of confusion about the procedure. I hope that it is now clear to everyone in the House.

Mr Agnew: I thank Mr Allister for his contribution, because he finished where I mean to start. I have in front of me the licence that was granted to Tamboran. It is available on the internet, so anybody can check whether what I am saying is accurate. As was pointed out, the licence allows for some drilling. To suggest that drilling is desktop research is misleading at best. The licence allows for a second exploration well to be drilled in years 4 and 5.

Mrs Foster: The Member is wrong. Tamboran has to apply to the Department for a licence to frack in years 4 and 5. It also has to submit a planning application and undergo an environmental impact assessment.

Mr Agnew: It is outlined in the licence, as the Minister said. There may be further permissions necessary, but it is within Tamboran's licence. It is a licence that includes fracturing, multiple horizontal legs, flow testing and seismic monitoring. It is on public record, and people can check it if they wish.

For technologies such as hydraulic fracturing, there is a distinct lack of standards. Standards are needed in the UK and internationally to ensure the consistency of safety measures and to guarantee that environmentally damaging or dangerous practices, such as those that have been recorded in the US, do not occur in the UK. Those are not

my words but the words of the Institution of Gas Engineers and Managers. Much has been made in the debate of the fact that we have sufficient regulatory provision to ensure that shale gas fracturing is safe. The Institution of Gas Engineers and Managers would not agree.

4.00 pm

In fact, Northern Ireland is the only region of these islands that does not have an independent environmental protection agency. So, I am not convinced that we have sufficient regulation. I have a lot of respect for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the work that it does, but it is an under-resourced part of the Department and it is open to political interference on operational decision-making because it is not an independent body.

When I was elected to the Assembly, I said that I would judge policy on the basis of whether it was good for the economy, good for people and good for the environment, and that is the basis on which I judge the proposals for the extraction of shale gas. Much has been made in the House today of the potential economic and energy benefits to Northern Ireland. With regard to economic benefits, the CEO of Tamboran said that there were 700 jobs in three counties — north and south, one county being Fermanagh — over 20 years and 500 to 800 wells. If we take Fermanagh's proportion of that out — I accept that these are crude figures — it would equate to approximately 10 jobs a year being created in Fermanagh. Many of those jobs will be temporary, and there is no guarantee that they will be provided to local people. This is a high-tech industry, and I do not know whether we have the skills in Northern Ireland to benefit from those jobs. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Agnew: We will put at risk our tourism and agriculture industry in the area. Tourism alone accounts for £25.9 million of economic activity in Fermanagh every year. I know that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board seeks to double tourist revenue by 2020. Fifty-two per cent of businesses in Fermanagh are agriculture-related. Fermanagh boasts nine nature reserves, over 56 areas of special scientific interest and the Marble Arch caves, the first UNESCO-designated geopark in the UK. All that will be put at risk if we allow fracking to take place in Fermanagh. I know that we need jobs, but we do not need so few jobs at such a high cost.

The social impact has been highlighted by the petition that I handed in today, which was signed by almost 2,800 people. Some have dismissed the health concerns and the water security concerns as scaremongering, but I will give some facts. On average, 20 million litres of water will be required for the fracking process to take place, and it is estimated that there is the potential for around 200 wells in County Fermanagh, which is 200 wells needing 20 million litres of water. I said earlier that Tamboran said that it will require to use chemicals in the Republic, and I do not see why there would be any difference here. I asked the Minister whether she would make it a condition of its licence that it did not use chemicals, and she said that that will not be happening.

Mr Frew asked for some facts, and I think that his points were relevant. It has been mentioned that between 500 and 600 chemicals have been used in different processes in the United States. Common chemicals used in the frack fluid include benzene and formaldehyde, both known carcinogens

— they present the risk of causing cancer. Even if those chemicals are not used in the fracking fluid, the produced water that comes back will pick up many chemicals underground, including benzene and ethyl benzene — both known carcinogens. It has been confirmed that there is radon under Fermanagh, so there is the potential for radioactive waste. In response to a question, the Environment Minister confirmed to me that we do not have the facilities to deal with that in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Agnew: Mike Nesbitt referred to the concerns of GPs in Fermanagh and suggested that, because there was a template letter, GPs in Fermanagh were not capable of conducting their own research and making their own decisions on whether they should send on those letters. He does an incredible disservice to GPs, who have gone through so many years of education and research to become doctors. I think that they are capable of making up their own mind.

Finally, moving on to the environmental impact of this activity, there has been some discussion about whether shale gas is a clean form of energy. Let me make it clear that it is not. In the full life cycle of shale gas, from the drilling to the burning of the gas, there are as many greenhouse gas emissions as from hard coal. It is not a clean form of energy. Joe Byrne asked about the potential for controlling the gas. Dr Ingraffea — I hope that I have pronounced his name correctly — who is from the United States and works in the gas industry, estimates that between 2% and 6% of methane is lost into the atmosphere during the process. Methane is between 20 and 25 times more harmful than CO₂ in its impact on climate change. Indeed, the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has indicated that the extraction and use of shale gas is not compatible with UK climate change targets. It was on the Minister's watch, when she was Minister of the Environment, that Northern Ireland signed up to the UK Climate Change Act 2008. We have responsibility, as part of the UK, to meet our climate change targets.

Mrs Foster: We are.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Agnew: The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, with its experience and research, does not believe that we can if we start using shale gas.

Many Members, including Stephen Moutray and Gordon Dunne, talked about the need for alternative energy. As Mr Flanagan pointed out, gas is not an alternative to gas. We have gas in Northern Ireland, and we use it. This is not an alternative. Mr Newton referred to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Newton referred to the potential for shale gas to stabilise prices. The fact is that shale gas is economically viable only because gas prices are high. That is why the technology is coming to the fore.

There is a sense that shale gas will somehow bring energy security to Northern Ireland. It will not be our gas; we do not have a nationalised gas industry in Northern Ireland. The UK Treasury will receive royalties; there is no guarantee of benefits to Northern Ireland. That gas will be sold on the international market, like all other gas.

I move on to the Members who were in favour of the motion. I thank the many Members who contributed to the debate. As Anno Lo and Phil Flanagan pointed out, the people of New York, the people of New Jersey, the people of North Rhine in Germany and those in France and an area of South Africa were all considerably concerned. All have either moratoria or bans on fracking because they were duly concerned. Water pollution and health concerns were touched on by Anna Lo and Joe Byrne. As we have heard today, shale fracturing is safe as long as nothing goes wrong. America has shown that things can go wrong. It has been pointed out that things go wrong with oil as well. That is why I want us to go full steam into renewables. Scotland has a much more progressive renewables agenda. We should follow its example and seek to have 100% renewable electricity by 2030.

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

Mr Agnew: A warning has come from across the Atlantic: we should heed it. It is time to put a moratorium on fracking.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 49; Noes 30.

AYES

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Ms Lo.

NOES

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr S Anderson and Mr Dunne.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly believes that a moratorium should be placed on the onshore and offshore exploration, development and production of shale gas by withdrawing licences for hydraulic fracturing (fracking), at least until the publication of a detailed environmental impact assessment into the practice; notes that hydraulic fracturing can put local water sources at risk of contamination; further notes that, amongst a variety of adverse environmental impacts, the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts, which put both workers and local communities at risk; considers that the production of hard-to-reach fossil fuels is not compatible with efforts to achieve carbon reduction targets; and urges the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give greater support to the generation of energy from renewable sources instead.

Mrs Foster: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to reflect on the incident that happened earlier in the debate and pay tribute to the security staff of the Building, who acted swiftly to deal with it. For the record, I understand that it was not caused by a member of the group who came to the House to engage with and, indeed, observe the debate on fracking. I want to thank the security staff for the way in which they dealt with the incident. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There should be no applause from the Public Gallery on any issue in the Chamber. Let me say to people in the Public Gallery that, should they continue, I will have the Public Gallery cleared very quickly.

I thank the Member for her point of order. I know that we do not normally refer to the Public Gallery, but, on this occasion, I can understand why she has. Our security staff dealt with the issue very promptly. It is now with the appropriate authorities, and we await their response.

I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next item of business.

EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

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

Mrs Dobson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that the welfare of laying hens directive is to come into effect from January 2012; recognises that the introduction of a ban on the use of battery cages has led to significant modifications on many farms; notes with concern that one third of Europe's egg industries will not be compliant with the new regulations by January 2012; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how she will ensure that Northern Ireland's egg producers will not be disadvantaged by cheaper imports which derive from non-compliant producers.

I am grateful to the Business Committee for selecting this important motion for debate. The timing is rather apt given that the new European regulations will come into effect in just over three weeks' time. I am aware that my party leader brought a similar motion to the House last year, and it was an intentional decision to bring the issue to the Assembly once again.

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

The Ulster Unionist Party has not seen any agreements on how the directive will be enforced, and it has received no assurances that our egg producers will not be disadvantaged. Therefore, I hope that the Minister of Agriculture will at least be able to provide greater clarity on what will happen next month, if not a total guarantee. Either way, it is regrettable that our egg producers have had to wait until such a late stage to receive that.

Members will most likely be aware of what the welfare of laying hens directive entails. Therefore, I do not propose to labour the detail of it too much. However, what I will say is that the directive — to be precise, 1997/74/EC — came into force on 3 August 1999, so everything that we are discussing today has been well known for some time. Northern Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom and most of the other member states of the European Union have had a transition period of 12 and a half years to ensure that their egg producers change their systems. Therefore, member states who make excuses about not having enough time or not having the information readily available or claim that there was never really an imperative to modify their systems are just talking plain nonsense.

The production of eggs in Northern Ireland can be broadly divided into two categories: caged and uncaged systems. Although it is not uncommon to see flocks of hens running around the yard of many farms here, that picturesque rural scene is completely different from the reality of egg production. Most of our eggs are produced either on large-scale free range farms, in barns, in new enriched cages or, until recently, in the old conventional cages. The rationale behind the EU directive is well known, and it was widely accepted that keeping hens in the older cages was detrimental to their health and welfare. We should remember that conventional battery cages, containing on

average five birds each and with a minimum cage area of 550 sq cm, allow less than a standard A4 sheet of paper of space for each animal.

In the 21st century, no other agricultural animal would be allowed to be kept in such conditions. Therefore, it is easy to see why the directive was thought necessary.

4.30 pm

The directive was the first piece of European legislation to phase out a method of food production as a result of concern for animal welfare. Not only has it significantly improved welfare standards, it has shifted consumer practices, with more and more people recognising the benefits of buying free-range products. In 1999, when the directive was confirmed, only 19% of the eggs that passed through UK packing stations were free range. By the end of last year, free-range eggs accounted for nearly 45% of that number. However, it is also worth noting that, before the directive was even finalised, animal welfare standards across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK were already relatively high in European terms.

Before I talk about what other member states have not done and what will not be met, I want to refer to all the efforts that have been made up to now. Our producers have prepared themselves well to comply with all legal requirements when the directive comes into full force on 1 January 2012. That was no easy task in itself, and it is estimated that complying with the directive will have cost egg producers £400 million across the UK. In fact, considering the oversupply of eggs in the market at the moment, which is putting many producers under severe financial pressure, and in light of the negligent attitude that other EU states are adopting, some of our producers believe that we may have prepared ourselves too well and too eagerly. I do not think that that is the case, but I can absolutely understand why some of them may believe it.

Although most producers in the EU have changed their production systems to comply with the directive, many — unfortunately and unacceptably, in my opinion — will not have completed the process by the January 2012 deadline. Figures from the European Commission indicate that approximately one third of the entire EU production will not comply with the directive. Indeed, Spain has admitted that it will still have 20 million hens in conventional cages next month. Given that the Spanish are one of Europe's biggest egg producers, the fact that they are able to stand up after having 12 and a half years to plan and say with little or no humility that they will not meet the target is, frankly, deplorable. My party's motion calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how she will ensure that this Province's producers are protected from cheaper imports from non-compliant states. There is a real fear that, as a result of so many member states not meeting the January 2012 deadline, illegal, non-compliant produce will continue to be allowed to be sold, putting our producers in an almost impossible situation.

The British Egg Council estimates that around 30% — 103 million — of the hens across Europe will still be in conventional cages on 1 January 2012. There will be in excess of 80 million eggs a day, which, in theory, will no longer be marketable in the EU. I say in theory, however, because we all know that those eggs are not simply going

to be destroyed. The non-compliant producers would not tolerate that, and the market could not cope with it. Therefore, the dilemma will arise of what to do with those non-compliant eggs. Although the member states that are to blame for the delay may like to see the principle of the free market remaining, in my and the Ulster Unionist Party's opinion that would be the equivalent of giving any member state the green light to do what it likes and disregard future directives if it so wishes. The European Commission must take decisive measures to ensure that non-compliance will not be tolerated and that member states should have to face the consequences of their deliberate decision not to comply with the directive.

Over the past six weeks there has been a hive of activity, with rumour and speculation at every turn. Nearly every possible outcome has been given consideration by the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the poultry industry and respective member state Governments. However, some things should already be taken for granted. No shell eggs or liquid or powder eggs should be imported into the UK from non-compliant member states. It may, perhaps, be the most difficult to police, but no food products that have egg ingredients should be imported from non-compliant member states.

It is gratifying that the four main UK supermarkets have taken a positive stance on the issue, but will the Minister give a commitment to put pressure directly on the Government of the United Kingdom to impress on them the urgency of the matter? What the EU countries that have failed to deliver the directive want to do with their own eggs is not a matter for this House or even the British Government. However, the Commission will be judged on its actions over coming months. If non-compliant eggs in whatever form are allowed to move freely across the EU, the Commission must act swiftly to bring that to an end. Of course, it goes without saying that the EU must initiate immediate infraction fines for non-compliant member states next month.

This is a serious matter that needs urgent resolution. Either the Commission will look weak and be walked over or it will show authority and discipline. Either way, farmers in Northern Ireland are watching closely. I have been speaking to many of them in the run-up to today's debate, and they are eagerly anticipating the Minister's response. I sincerely hope that she does not disappoint them.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): The Committee supports the intention of the motion, and I will support it, as will the majority, if not all, of the members who were present when we debated the matter in Committee today.

This is a serious issue for our farming industry and, in particular, our egg producers. The whole industry will agree that it had to happen. It was going to happen at some point, and the industry has shown spirit through the fact that it is nearly 100% compliant. It is reassuring that we can say that with surety. Although the industry has experienced a lot of pain and invested a lot of money in trying to step up to the mark, it has got to a point where it is compliant. It has put in a lot of effort. The industry is now telling me — I speak as an individual MLA with constituents — that, after all that effort, pain and cost, it finds that a lot of member

states in Europe do not comply and have had no intention of complying.

Mr Poots: I concur with the Member that, here in the United Kingdom, we have a sense of fair play and seek to observe the rules. However, it appears that the same repeat offenders defy the EU rules over and over again and get away with it. Does he agree that our national Government need to pursue that vigorously to ensure that fair play applies in the European Union as opposed to allowing one state to do what it wants with environmental legislation, animal welfare legislation or whatever the case may be?

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with him 100%. The list of countries that are non-compliant at present comprises Spain, Poland, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, France, Romania and Bulgaria. Sweden, Austria, Germany and Luxembourg have already banned conventional cages and are therefore compliant, and Denmark, the Czech Republic, Britain and the Republic of Ireland have indicated that they will be in a position to comply with the legislation by January 2012. That shows the challenges that our egg producers and farming industry face at this time. They now face completely unfair competition in the coming years. It is incumbent on us and DARD and DEFRA at a UK level to do something about that, and I impress on the Minister the fact that we should put pressure on the Commission. On this issue, I have a lot of sympathy for the Department because we can see how Europe works. It is a complete mystery to us and even to the people who work in Europe.

When it comes to fines and infractions for non-compliance, Europe does not mind bringing the hammer down. It can enforce whatever it likes, and it can come down heavy on any member state; namely the UK, and, in particular, Northern Ireland. So, I have a certain degree of sympathy for the Department and the industry, but I urge the Minister to pressurise the Commission where she can to enforce the regulations on the member states that have not complied and to proceed with infractions to punish the states that do not comply or that openly defy the Commission.

I ask the Department to speak to DEFRA to try to implement some sort of trade ban on non-compliant eggs. That is important, and it would provide protection for our industry at UK level. Although it is something that we do not want to do, it is something that we have to do to protect our industry from the evil of the uncompetitive market that has been produced by Europe. It is fair to say that I am a Euro-sceptic. I visited Europe not long ago, and that visit did nothing to assuage my concerns, fears and scepticism. This is only one issue that makes that scepticism even deeper. Our farming community and our egg producers are being punished to the extent that some of them, after all the money and pain that they have gone through to get to this point, could face extinction because of unfair trade and the uncompetitive nature of the market.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree with the motion. The European Commission wants laying hens to be kept in enriched cages. That directive goes back to 1999 —13 years ago— and it was mentioned again in December 2004.

The first thing that I have to say on the subject concerns the total hypocrisy of Europe. This is a classic case of hypocrisy, and I am sure that everyone here today will agree with

that. On the one hand, local producers are being made to be compliant while, on the other hand, producers in other parts of Europe are doing what they want to do. Members have already alluded to the fact that, on current figures, 13 countries are expected to comply, seven refused to comply and the remaining seven did not even bother to produce any data on their egg industries. It is quite evident why they have not produced any data.

What law governs all of this in Europe? I am not being flippant when I say that the law governing the whole scheme is based on a gentleman's agreement. There is not even a law to make them comply. Europe has got to be real on this. In Northern Ireland, as the previous Member who spoke mentioned, we have seen what we have had to suffer on compliance issues and the money that was levied on us. Here we have a classic case of non-compliance, and it is costing the non-compliant states nothing.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. He indicated that there is no law to make them comply. Can he clarify that position? I thought that a European directive was in place to make member states comply.

Mr McMullan: The law that I am talking about is what I am reading out regarding the lack of enforcement of the directive. It is there. I have not had time to dig it all out, but you will find that it is there. It is ludicrous in the extreme, and, when I say that it is a gentleman's agreement, I literally mean that there is a gentleman's agreement on the whole issue.

What is it costing the home producers here? I talked to producers this week, and it would not be financially feasible to run a business based on a shed of anything fewer than 40,000 birds. It is an outlay of over £700,000 for 40,000 birds. Indeed, one gentleman told me that he spent £1.9 million putting up one shed for his hens.

4.45 pm

What can we do? I am calling for a total ban on eggs from non-compliant European countries. We have to protect what we have here. Our agrifood industry is growing. Even in today's market, it is one of our gems because of the amount of money that it generates annually. A fear for the whole scheme is that non-compliant countries will be able to put their illegal eggs back into the market here through the agrifood, baking and other industries, which will bring the whole thing down.

As was said, we are expected to spend nearly £400 million UK-wide. For compliance, that is £25 per bird. It is still not mandatory to comply, and one third of the EU population will not comply. We talk about labelling eggs from illegal non-enriched cages and enriched cages, but how can we expect someone who is producing eggs illegally to stamp them legally? It is an absolute nonsense and simply will not work.

There are some 85 million eggs from non-compliant countries in Europe each day. There should be no leeway on the time factor for non-compliant countries. They have had 13 years to get ready. The producers who went to the bank to take out money to build sheds and improve their business are now paying bank charges, and all authorities must protect them.

The only protection we can offer here is a total ban on eggs deemed illegal from non-compliant countries. We

must congratulate the companies that have backed not using eggs from non-compliant countries. If we allow eggs from non-compliant countries into our local market, we will undermine the price that local producers receive. We must protect our agrifood industry.

Mrs D Kelly: I congratulate the Members who tabled the motion. I want to pick up on Mr McMullan's concern about cheap imports. The Ulster Farmers' Union has issued a press release about a meeting with Minister O'Neill and how she may handle the issue. It would be useful to hear whether Minister O'Neill can share her discussions with farmers' representatives with us.

This is legislation, not a gentlemen's agreement. It is the first EU legislation intended to improve animal welfare. The welfare of laying hens directive is a challenge to the EU about how serious it is about animal welfare. The ignorance of the member states that have chosen not to comply with the directive should be a standpoint for the Commission.

I ask Members to reflect not only on the needs of egg producers but on the reason for the legislation. The reason is that a caged hen has a space of 550 sq cm, which is equivalent to an A4 sheet of paper. Farms here have invested in enriched cages, which cost an additional £25 per cage. However, a hen's welfare improves because it has a space of 750 sq cm in those enriched cages, which must include a nest, a perching space, litter to allow pecking and scratching and unrestricted access to a feed trough. When members of the public see things in that context, they will hopefully make a decision on what eggs they buy. In a survey that the EU Commission undertook, 57% of all EU citizens said that they would prefer to purchase eggs laid by hens that were free range or were in enriched cages than those from hens kept in poor animal welfare standards.

I note that, in a debate in the House of Commons, the British Government said that they would issue buying standards across all their Departments. I do not know whether Minister O'Neill will be able to tell us whether she has discussed that with her Executive colleagues. There is substantial procurement of eggs in all the catering facilities across government Departments. For example, hospital and health authorities alone would procure substantial amounts. That solution might go some way to allay concerns, and it is something proactive that the Minister can do to give confidence to producers that we take this very seriously. Members are right to point out how the producers here have invested so much money and are rightly concerned about the impact it will have and the disadvantage that their industry —

Mr Copeland: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Yes.

Mr Copeland: Does the Member agree that there is something amiss when our poultry and egg producers are, to comply with the legislation, having to sell their cages and, instead of being purchased by the authority that is requiring the change in legislation, those cages are going to non-compliant EU states, which may well further disadvantage home producers? Does that not suggest that those who are imposing the legislation should purchase the old cages to assist the farmers in the transition?

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome Mr Copeland's intervention; he made a very valid point. There are other examples in the farming community across the EU when the Commission has stepped in to help with transition. That ought to be the case if the EU is serious about ensuring that the legislation is to be complied with.

The time by which compliance has to be enforced is fast approaching. We see that the Commission is reneging on much of its commitment on enforcement action, and I note from the information supplied to us that it is talking about how it will have inspections and commence infringement and infraction proceedings against non-compliant states. Mind you, if it came down on those states as hard as it did on farmers here in relation to the single farm payment, we would have some level of confidence in those plans. We will monitor very closely actions on compliance and infraction proceedings against member states that do not comply and compare them with the way in which our farmers have been treated in relation to the single farm payment.

I urge the Minister to take whatever steps are at her disposal. I recognise that the Minister has to rely a bit on DEFRA and other EU member states and will be constrained, but I hope that she will take whatever opportunities are available to her to stand up for poultry producers in the North.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and congratulate Jo-Anne Dobson on tabling it. I am rapidly becoming as Euro-sceptic as Mr Frew. It looks like the tendency of the UK to do its best to comply with directives is once again going to result in our producers being penalised for their own compliance.

There is a depressing inevitability about what is happening. In the history of EU directives, some of which are very worthy and some of which are completely daft, this is a good one. The impression is that countries with a tradition of fair play and respect for the law, such as the UK, Sweden, Germany and Austria, will comply, whereas others, whom I hardly need to name but they certainly include France, will not. When did the French Government ever stand up to the farming lobby? That will be a first, some day. They will delay things, ask for extensions or a reversal of the policy or, more likely, just ignore it. We will have to see what Europe does about that. That is happening again, and our producers stand to lose out if Europe does not take decisive action to ban the use of eggs produced by what will be, from New Year's Day, illegal methods.

I understand that it is up to individual member states to monitor their own compliance in these areas. There will be a problem in some countries where perhaps an effort has been made but is not quite enough and producers are partially compliant. It seems to me — others have said the same thing — that the only effective action would be to totally ban the export of eggs or egg products from any country whose Government cannot certify 100% compliance until such time as it can be certified. I then ask this question: what are the chances of that happening? We are talking about Europe, so, frankly, in my opinion, there is no chance. The EU authorities will fudge the issue, delay and procrastinate in order to satisfy their vested interests in France, Spain, Italy and elsewhere.

I note that the UK Government have considered a unilateral ban. However, in their words, they feel that it is fraught with legal difficulty and is perhaps challengeable in the European

court. Frankly, I say, "So what?". If it suits the French to encourage illegality, why should the UK not stand up for its own interests for once? Quite simply, if the EU tries in some way to bypass its own ban, which is being put into force with 12 years' notice, the UK should unilaterally ban the import of these products.

The ban has been flagged up for 12 years. It is an important animal welfare issue. Anybody who has ever visited a battery egg-laying house of the old style — in my previous life, I visited quite a few of them — would feel uncomfortable about the way that hens were caged and treated inhumanely over the years. I am encouraged by the attitude of the major UK supermarkets, which seem to be taking a firm line on this. I looked at the list of supermarkets and cannot see that any are missing. That is good. However, government action is required. I await the Minister's response to the motion and for her to detail what she, in co-operation with her UK counterparts — it requires joint action — intends to do to ensure that our producers can operate on a level playing field.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, support the motion. This is a serious issue for the farming community, and I commend those who brought it to the Floor of the House today. While the introduction of the new directive to ban the use of battery cages and have them replaced with the new enriched cages is welcomed by animal welfare groups and many others, there is no doubt that it has placed a huge financial burden on producers in Northern Ireland, who have made the appropriate investment in order to comply with the legislation as it comes into effect on 1 January 2012. Approximately 80% of our producers are already compliant, and the majority of the others have indicated that they will meet the deadline. Unfortunately, there are a few who will cease production as it seems to be unviable for them to comply.

For many years, farmers in Northern Ireland have led the way on animal welfare reforms at their own expense. This is another typical example of the farming community in Northern Ireland having to spend millions of pounds of its own money to comply with EU legislation, when we already know that there will be large-scale non-compliance in other EU member states such as Spain and all the countries that the Chair of the Agriculture Committee mentioned. Let us look at France, for example. France has admitted that 6 million hens will still be housed in conventional cages on 1 January. Italy and Spain will still have some 65 million hens in non-compliant cages at that time.

If appropriate action is not taken to put in place the proper safeguards to prohibit the importation of non-compliant eggs to Northern Ireland, it will spell further disaster for our producers. They will be placed at a serious commercial disadvantage and will not be able to compete with cheaper imports from non-compliant member states.

5.00 pm

Remember, our producers are already at a serious disadvantage to their southern counterparts, who received £14.4 million to help them meet the new standards. Northern Ireland producers were more or less hung out to dry by the Minister and her Department. They completely failed to meet the needs of the sector or to seriously tackle the issue of an alternative funding stream, whether through the farm modernisation or rural development programmes or

some other scheme, to help people with the financial burden of compliance.

This situation has already created an anti-competitive market for our producers that could be further distorted by cheap imports unless a ban on conventional production is equally enforced across EU member states. Producers across Northern Ireland who have made substantial investments and financial sacrifices must now be protected from cheap imports and assisted by the Department in the further growth of their business. There is a real concern that, now all our producers have fully complied with the legislation, the old position that we have witnessed over many years, whereby imports will still be readily available from non-compliant EU member states, will still exist. Should that particular situation remain, I believe that we are in real danger of legislating our farming industry out of business.

Minister, the responsibility now lies at your door: you must use all your power and do all you can to protect this arm of our farming industry and our agrifood sector. I await your response to the House today, which I hope will give confidence, reassurance and protection to our egg producers.

As the Member who spoke previously said, I am relieved that the supermarkets appear to be taking a stand by saying that they will only sell eggs of a compliant nature. That is to be welcomed, but a close focus must be kept on that. I would like the Minister to inform the House of what meetings she has had with various bodies as she seeks to move forward to give the required protection to our producers here in Northern Ireland. I support the motion.

Mrs Overend: I thank my colleague Jo-Anne Dobson for tabling the motion. The House has known for some time that this issue was coming. Egg producers across Northern Ireland, including many in my constituency, have spent considerable amounts of money on preparation for this directive. The fact that we are standing here less than four weeks before the new ruling comes into effect, noting that one third of European eggs produced will technically be illegal, is a very unfortunate state of affairs. Given that 20% of the UK's total egg requirement is imported, it is difficult to see how the demand will be addressed.

There is a very real danger that the importation of non-compliant eggs could undermine the market and distort prices. I understand that the egg industry is in a unique position here in Northern Ireland, in that 90% of all eggs sold in Northern Ireland are produced by the Northern Ireland industry. The Northern Ireland egg industry has received some real support, from not only local supermarkets but large retailers. I briefly met industry representatives this afternoon, who informed me that the new legislation is increasing the cost of a dozen eggs by 15p. We are duty-bound to support our local producers.

I had a tour around a poultry farm in my constituency in the early summer, and I was impressed by the dedication of that farming family in complying with the new legislation. However, they pressed home to me exactly how that additional financial outlay has affected their business.

I believe that it would be entirely wrong and misjudged of the European Commission to sit back and accept that this directive will not be met and that nothing can be done about it. If the Commission appears weak on this issue, how can it genuinely expect to implement future directives and have

them strictly adhered to? Member states should have no excuses about not meeting this directive: they have had 12 years in which to do so. However, I accept that some states have had more incentive to comply than others.

The sector in the Republic of Ireland benefited from the poultry welfare scheme: a pot of money totalling €16 million, which was made available through the rural development programme to help prepare for the laying hens directive. It meant that anyone investing a minimum of €10,000 per holding in new structures, investments, conversions or upgrades could avail themselves of a 40% grant.

The NI farm modernisation scheme operated by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) did not provide such targeted support to the sector here. The Republic of Ireland's targeted agriculture modernisation schemes also included a package of support to improve welfare standards for sows.

The fate of the UK's pig sector, in which the breeding herd fell sharply after the sector invested some £323 million to comply with the UK's unilateral ban on tethers and close-confinement stalls, has been cited by many as a template of what could happen to our egg producers if they have to complete with illegal eggs and lower welfare standards.

Taking all those factors into consideration, you can understand why many in the sector feel that the odds are stacked against them. For once, where the implementation of EU directives is concerned, the UK is not on its own. Countries such as Germany, Sweden, Austria and Luxembourg banned un-enriched cages, and those countries plus others also face the prospect of many millions of hens producing illegal eggs in the EU after 1 January. The Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, has repeatedly said that it is primarily the responsibility of member states to implement EU legislation properly, even when it was abundantly clear that many member states have been dragging their feet.

In addition to knowing that several member states will be non-compliant — and non-compliant on a grand scale — we are also in the bizarre position of not knowing the scale of the problem in Greece, Hungary, Italy and Latvia. There is a lot of concern in the industry across the European Union about that. However, we must start taking seriously the potentially detrimental effects that it could have on our producers. Farmers in Northern Ireland have been given little or no assurance by DARD or the Commission. I call on the Minister to provide clarity urgently on that issue. I await her response with bated breath.

Mr Irwin: It has been over a year since this matter was discussed in the Chamber, with a similar motion in October 2010. It is clear that the only thing that has changed in the intervening period is the fact that our producers are out of pocket by preparing for that expensive European directive. One other important element that has not changed is the fact that non-compliant producers remain non-compliant. In the next few weeks, no one envisages a situation whereby all producers across the EU will suddenly become compliant. We are therefore staring in the face of a situation whereby our law-abiding producers here in Northern Ireland will be at a direct disadvantage to those who have not put in place the necessary compliant changes. That presents difficulties for the sector in the days and weeks ahead.

The industry is under enough pressure already, even setting this issue to one side. However, the immense expense incurred by producers here in attempting to comply with the directive has put an even greater strain on the sector. Although the welfare of livestock, whether it is cattle, hens or pigs, should be a priority for any developed nation, the European Commission has not given the matter the close compliance scrutiny that it deserves, given the expense incurred by our producers and the apparent unwillingness of some member states even to attempt to comply. In fact, some member states appear totally uninterested.

Based on recent parliamentary exchanges in the European Parliament, I am alarmed that so many countries appear to be uninterested in the looming deadline. That makes a mockery of the directive; it also makes a mockery of our industry in Northern Ireland, which has rallied to be compliant by the deadline. That is European law-making at its expensive worst, and our producers will be placed at a competitive disadvantage unless Europe bares its teeth towards those who have little hope of — or interest in — compliance by 1 January.

I am interested to hear how our Minister intends to block the importation of produce from non-compliant producers in order to protect the investment made by our producers and to enable a fair trading environment. I am also keen to hear whether she intends to work in tandem with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in enacting any UK-wide legislation that seeks to safeguard our industry here from competitive distortion with non-compliant member states. The matter has worried me for many months, and my reservations about other member states' lack of interest in compliance are proving to be correct as we approach the January deadline.

The House cannot permit a situation to develop in which a vital part of our agrifood industry suffers financially in the name of breaking its neck to meet yet another EU directive. The issue needs urgent attention. I urge the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Executive and our MEPs to ensure that Northern Ireland producers are not placed at a disadvantage. I support the motion.

Mr Allister: This is a preposterous situation. Our farmers and poultry producers, in good faith and without any state help, expended a great deal of money to put themselves in a compliant position, to find that their parallel farmers across Europe, in many cases in utter bad faith and with the compliance of their Governments, did nothing to comply with the requirements. Indeed, the situation is so preposterous that there are reports that one producer in Greece received €6.8 million from the EU to help buy old-style cages between the years 2000 and 2006, even though the directive was made in 1999.

Farmers in the rest of Europe were tooling up to continue to be non-compliant, while farmers in the United Kingdom were tooling up to be compliant. They toolled up at their own expense, and that is an added dimension of the scandal. The Administration here utterly failed the farming community in the poultry sector.

There was the opportunity under the rural development programme to give funding to assist on welfare grounds, as the Irish Republic did. None was given. The Minister told me, maybe last week, in response to a question, that

funding was given under the farm modernisation scheme. I think not. The funding that was given under the farm modernisation scheme was not to buy enriched cages. It was to buy water drinkers and things such as that. As I understand it, not a penny of funding was afforded to make the transition to enriched cages. Maybe the Minister would like to take the opportunity to correct the position that she stated in the House last week.

The situation is made all the more ridiculous given that the two reasons that Europe gave for the introduction of the directive in 1999 were to avoid distortion in the internal market and to avoid a loss of confidence among consumers. Where now is the distortion in the internal market, when we face a situation in which compliant eggs will be traded equally with non-compliant eggs? Where now is the confidence among consumers, when we face a situation in which they do not know what they are buying?

What do we do in this situation? It is quite clear to me that there is one effective answer: a total ban on the export of any eggs from within non-compliant countries. We do not need to get into the business of marking compliant eggs and non-compliant eggs. We need Europe to visit a penalty upon non-compliant countries. That penalty should be an absolute ban on the export of any of their eggs, whether compliant or non-compliant. That will be the quickest thing to concentrate their minds on being compliant. In tandem with that, there should be infraction proceedings. My goodness, our farmers in Northern Ireland have suffered the imposition of fines on this Administration for getting a line wrong on a map. Yet we seem to be poised in a situation in which great swathes of Europe will be given some sort of concession or by-ball. The least that the House should do is to cry foul and say that that is not on.

Minister, I suggest that we need a fortress UK policy on egg importation. Let us take a stand with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and its Minister. Let us do something significant and worthwhile to show that we are on the side of our hard-pressed poultry farmers.

5.15 pm

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Jo-Anne Dobson and Robin Swann for tabling the motion, which raises the important issue of the ban on conventional cages for laying hens from 1 January 2012. It calls on me to outline the steps that I have taken to ensure that the North's egg producers will not be disadvantaged by cheaper imports from non-compliant member states. I welcome the debate.

I will outline the representations that I have made to Westminster, through my ministerial counterparts, and to Brussels to protect local producers' interests. I also want to outline the discussions that I have had with the industry, as it came up a few times in the debate, and my discussions with Minister Simon Coveney. I will then apprise Members of the actions that I have taken and the measures that will be in place from 1 January 2012 to enforce the ban and prevent producers here from being disadvantaged through the actions of those member states that have failed to comply with the new directive.

The ban on conventional cages was introduced as a result of scientific evidence that the welfare of hens kept in such

battery cages is inadequate. Members referred to that throughout the debate. In a separate piece of EU legislation, the EU egg marketing regulations, the marketing of class A eggs produced in conventional battery cages in the EU is prohibited from 1 January 2012. Class A is the highest grade of eggs, and those are sold as shell eggs.

Based on the information that we hold, the vast majority of our producers will be compliant on 1 January 2012. However, as many Members picked up on, 13 of the 27 member states will not be compliant by then. That accounts for about 50 million hens, as a Member said, that will still be in conventional cages across the EU on that date. Given that level of non-compliance among other member states, I am very concerned that our producers, who have converted and met the directive, will be set at a disadvantage as a result of having to compete with cheaper eggs from non-compliant conventional cages in other member states. Illegal production could adversely affect economic stability and fairness in a sector that is very important to our economy. As I said in the Chamber last week during Question Time, I will continue to do whatever I can to protect local producers, who invested millions of pounds in making sure that they became compliant and met the EU directive.

Regarding recent developments in Brussels, I share the industry's frustration at the lack of action by the European Commission. My ministerial colleagues and I tried to convince the Commission, many months ago, that simply relying on a gentleman's agreement would not be enough to deal with the negative impact that non-compliance would cause and that additional enforcement measures needed to be put in place. We put the case strongly that such measures were needed to prevent market disturbance.

The implementation of the directive has been hugely challenging for the Commission, but that is for it to deal with. It has had to balance its desire to take a tough enforcement stance on a flagship welfare issue against the economic and political background in a number of the non-compliant member states. However, putting a large number of producers out of business or destroying huge quantities of eggs are not practical solutions. At last October's agriculture council, the Commission definitely ruled out the option of an intra-community trade ban, and hence any legislative solution that would protect our compliant producers.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs O'Neill: I will let you in a wee bit further on; I just want to make a few initial points. The Commission then proposed a gentleman's agreement that would give non-compliant producers longer to comply, allow eggs from illegal cages to be processed only in the originating member state, and require an action plan to be produced, showing when each member state would reach full compliance.

A committee of experts, which met on 29 November in Brussels, was a last-chance effort by the Commission to find a workable solution; however, no progress was made on the gentleman's agreement, which has now effectively been dropped. At that meeting, the Commission requested non-compliant countries to produce action plans, which are being considered by the Commission in Brussels today. It was made very clear to the Commission that safeguards need to be in place whether or not there is a gentleman's

agreement. In the discussions to find a workable solution, I, together with my ministerial colleagues in Britain and the South, took the view that although we were disappointed that no legal solution has been found, we did not want the 2012 deadline delayed. We want it to move forward because we need to prepare to explore the idea of a practical solution that would give some protection to us and to other compliant producers by ensuring that eggs from non-compliant cages do not leave their country of origin.

Members raised the possibility of taking unilateral action and bringing in a ban on all imports of eggs and egg products that have been produced in conventional cages in other member states, and that is being considered. At last week's committee of experts meeting, the Commission strongly warned member states against adopting unilateral trade bans, but, only this afternoon, I met delegates from the British Egg Industry Council, and they raised with me the possibility of a trade ban. They also told me that they have legal advice that suggests that that is possible, which is contrary to what the Commission is saying. They have agreed to forward that on to me this afternoon, and I am going to look at it because it is important that I am as robust as possible. However, I need the legal backup to be able to take action. Therefore, that is what we are currently exploring, and, hopefully, I will be able to tell Members more about that when I have sight of that legal advice.

In respect of the enforcement strategy, my officials are working with their counterparts to ensure that there is a practical enforcement solution to help manage the conditions across this island and in Britain. In the absence of agreement at EU level, and as I emphasised to the industry delegation this afternoon, I will take forward the most robust enforcement strategy that is within my power. I have to act within the legal constraints that exist to deal with non-compliance, but if the legal advice that the industry believes it has allows us to take a more robust approach, I am very open to that, and I will look at that positively and take it forward. However, I need to get that legal advice so that I can make a decision on the way forward.

In respect of the measures to prevent illegal imports from arriving here in the first place, it is worth noting that the vast majority of imported eggs come into England, and DEFRA's actions there also protect the markets here. Less than 3% of our eggs arrive here directly from Europe. Having said that, we have to deploy the same approach as England in respect of any direct imports that come into the North.

DEFRA will have risk-based surveillance in place from 1 January 2012 to ensure that imported class A shell eggs from other member states have been produced in compliance with the cage ban. Surveillance on imports of shell eggs will include the use of ultraviolet light analysis to identify batches of caged eggs that are not from an enriched cage environment. That technique has been used successfully to identify caged eggs in batches described as being produced in alternative systems, for example, free-range systems.

Mr Lunn: I am curious to know, when the directive becomes effective on 1 January 2012, will it be legal for the UK to import eggs that have been illegally produced?

Mrs O'Neill: I am not sure if I picked up what the Member was asking me. I will happily give way again if he wants to ask the question again.

Mr Lunn: Thank you for giving way again. After the directive comes into force on 1 January 2012, will it be legal for the UK to import eggs that have been produced illegally under that directive?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, that is the legal basis on which we will have to move forward.

In respect of the UV light system, if eggs are found to have come from any sort of illegal or non-compliant system, they will be prevented from being marketed as class A eggs and will be sent for processing and treated as class B eggs. If the eggs are then found to be from a compliant system, they will be released. That scrutiny will mean that importers will make a greater effort to ensure the source and integrity of the eggs that they import, given the economic disadvantage that would follow if they were to import illegally produced eggs.

While we have no desire to disrupt trade or disadvantage compliant producers wherever they are in Europe, DEFRA Ministers and I will continue to press the European Commission to request that member states share the list of compliant producers, so that we can check those against any import consignments. That would mean that those consignments will be less likely to be held up, and trade will not be disrupted. Therefore, if we know that they are compliant, there will not be as many checks involved. However, if we know that they are coming in from a non-compliant producer, more directed action can be taken.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for giving way, and I apologise for rising twice in one debate. Is there any evidence to suggest that the authorised and unauthorised environments have a different effect on the health of the flock? Is there a difference in the level of antibiotics that have to be fed in each case? Does one or the other have a preferential effect on the end product, that is, the eggs, in terms of public health and safety?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. However, it is a bit too technical for me, so I need to speak to the veterinary service. I am happy to respond to the Member's question about the effect of the antibiotic, and I will do so quickly after the debate.

I want to pick up on an issue that was raised in the debate around the British Retail Consortium. It has come out publicly in support of egg producers and has guaranteed that the conventional caged eggs will not be bought by the major retailers or used as ingredients in their own-brand products. That is a positive development. If there is anything that we can do locally with major supermarkets, we should be doing so to make sure that we get the best for our local industry and those who are compliant.

I will deploy the same methods of enforcement that DEFRA has outlined to stop illegally produced eggs from entering the North. The ultraviolet light analysis combined with the sharing of the lists will be key to our being able to do that. We are going to have to monitor the situation very carefully in the new year.

I am not going to hesitate in communicating with the Commission on any further issues that arise early in the

new year. The Commission has consistently stated its position that the directive requirements will be law and that member states must comply, but, as many Members have said, that does not appear to be the case. We need a stricter, stronger legal framework to be able to pursue that.

The ban on conventional cages is an important welfare measure, and producers have had a good lead-in time to prepare for the transition. I want to make every effort to ensure full compliance with the ban. I will also support compliant producers here by taking robust action against all those producers whom we find to be non-compliant after 1 January. Based on the information that we hold, the indications are that 95% of our local producers will be compliant. That is a very high percentage. There are about 222 production sites here, and that is what will be compliant come 1 January. A number of the remaining producers are in the process of amending their systems to ensure that they will be compliant in the next few weeks. I am pleased to say that the majority of our local egg producers are compliant, and I intend to take action against the small number that are not.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs O'Neill: Sorry; I meant to give way to you earlier.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for giving way. I had a number of issues, but I will curtail them somewhat. It seems hugely ironic that the Minister and the Department will be willing to take enforcement action against a small number of our producers in Northern Ireland who are non-compliant, but were not prepared to take on the non-compliant EU member states that were producing millions and millions of eggs. I have heard nothing in the Minister's speech that will support and protect the egg producers in Northern Ireland. That is shameful. I support the Department banning the importation of eggs from all non-compliant countries to Northern Ireland.

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is trying to make a political point. I have clearly laid out what I intend to do and the enforcement action that we intend to take. We will be taking action against any non-compliant producers of the 3% of our eggs that come from Europe. I have outlined the processes that are going to be in place. The industry came to me only today to talk about the legal advice. If, having seen that advice, I see that I can take stronger, robust action within the legal framework, I will, as I said earlier, do so. The Member needs to listen more carefully to what I am saying. I said earlier that we are thoroughly investigating the possibility of taking unilateral action and about looking at the intra-community trade ban. We need to look seriously at that. If I have the legal framework to do that, I will do that. I will be as robust as I can.

Dolores Kelly raised the issue of government buying standards. That was a good point, and I intend to write to our Central Procurement Directorate, which looks after all procurement for the Executive. It would be a good point for the wider Executive to consider. The funding that was made available to the poultry sector to help them to convert to enriched cages was also raised. Last week, I made the point to the Member during Question Time that the Department brought forward a funding programme under tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme. The point was raised about what Dublin had done and the €16 million that it brought forward. Dublin was able to bring that forward because

it ended its installation aid scheme and early retirement scheme.

The additional funding was announced as part of the package that arose —

5.30 pm

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

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The most important thing is that DARD is determined to take action. We have had numerous meetings with the industry, and we will continue to have. We will be raising the issue and working in tandem with our colleagues where we need to, and we will be as robust as we can to protect our local producers —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mrs O'Neill: — to make sure that they are not competitively disadvantaged.

Mr Swann: I thank the Members who contributed to today's debate, and I thank the Minister for her participation and for staying to the end.

The issue impacts on many constituencies, and it was useful to have a wide range of input. We heard many Members voicing their concern about the potential impact on local egg producers of cheaper, illegal eggs. The headline figure of £400 million being invested in enriched colony cages by the industry as a whole is somewhat hard to comprehend, and that was highlighted by my party colleague Jo-Anne Dobson. However, breaking that industry-wide figure down into individual businesses, which comprise farmers and their families who often employ local people in those industries, perhaps makes the impact of the legislation not being fully implemented across all the EU member states easier to understand. In many cases, individual farmers have spent several hundred thousand pounds — in some cases, millions of pounds — improving welfare standards ahead of the welfare of laying hens directive, which will come into effect on 1 January. Those producers have invested for the future but have done so on the justifiable assumption that producers in all EU member states would live up to the same obligations with regard to hen welfare. Sadly, as we heard today, that has not been the case.

I will give an example of a constituent in North Antrim who is typical of many in the sector. He invested £15 per bird to convert his existing poultry houses and fit them out with the enriched colony cages. In addition to that significant outlay and because of the reduced stocking density, that farmer has had to reduce his stock from 30,000 birds to 27,000 birds per house. Like so many in the industry who have planned for the future, that farmer has made a large investment and, given the production costs, that is difficult enough to justify, especially when the cost is to be spread across fewer birds. That farmer now has to face the real threat from cheaper, illegal eggs, produced to a lower welfare standard, that will erode his already slim profit margin. Eroding profit margins even further puts increased pressure on the egg sector in Northern Ireland.

The directive has also resulted in producers, particularly those without successors willing to take over the poultry

houses, deciding to leave the sector early, which will further reduce our domestic capacity. I understand that questions to the Commission have been tabled by the Agriculture Committee for this month's Strasbourg sitting. According to my colleague in the European Parliament, Jim Nicholson, those questions seek clarity on a number of issues, including the true extent of production in unenriched cages across the EU, what action has been taken to fully comply, the legal situation with regard to restricting the trade of illegal eggs and, crucially for the future, what lessons have been learned about the implementation of directives.

With regard to some of the Members' contributions, I thank my party colleagues Jo-Anne Dobson, Michael Copeland and Sandra Overend for their support. Jo-Anne highlighted very clearly that the directive initially came in on 3 August 1999 and that member states had had 13 years to comply. She said that non-compliant countries can manage what they want to do with their eggs and that that was not a matter for this House, except for one thing, Minister: they should not enter our market.

Michael Copeland, our new poultry expert from east Belfast, asked for the Government to come forward and buy out those cages for the large industry that he represents.

A Member: The KFC industry.

Mr Swann: Possibly the KFC.

Sandra Overend highlighted the costs incurred. With only four weeks to go, one third of the EU is non-compliant. Member states have received the incentives that she referred to — £16 million from Ireland's rural development programme — while our Department and its rural development programme failed to support our farmers in any way.

We are lucky to have the full support of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development here today, and that shows the testimony and the detail that the motion brought forward. Not only did it show that the House is united behind the poultry industry, it showed the number of Euro-sceptics in the House. The regulation also brought forward some of the absurdities evident in EU legislation. I think that Mr Lunn said that this is not one of them. However, it seemed that he was moving from the pro-European Alliance Party slightly towards UKIP.

Mr Lunn: Never.

Mr Swann: You are on the wrong side of the House for that quote.

Mr McMullan highlighted the total hypocrisy of Europe. Mr Frew agreed and spoke about his recent experiences of Europe. I ask the Minister for one thing that, I think, my party leader, Tom Elliott, raised: will you clarify in writing for the House the gentlemen's agreement that is behind the legislation? Mr McMullan seemed to imply that the legislation and the technicality of the enriched cages was the gentlemen's agreement. Will you clarify to the House and our industry that the enforcement of the regulation is the gentlemen's agreement that you referred to? It is a dangerous message to send out from the House to our producers and our egg industry that the legislation could be perceived as a gentlemen's agreement rather than European legislation.

Mrs Kelly referred to the animal welfare challenges that lie ahead. She said that this is one of the first pieces of animal welfare legislation from the EU. She also suggested that the UK Government should investigate buying-out standards for Departments, whether it be for schools, hospitals or even the MoD. I think that the Minister agreed to take that forward. Jim Allister highlighted the missed opportunity under the farm modernisation programme and said that we needed to supply confidence to our consumers. He also said — I paraphrase slightly — that we should tool up for a fortress-UK approach.

Minister, we called for confidence, reassurance and the protection of our egg industry. I understand that you are seeking legal advice and looking for clarity. As the deadline is 1 January 2012, which is less than four weeks away, and taking into consideration holidays etc, we really need you to take guidance on that legal advice as a matter of urgency in support of our agriculture industry, especially our egg industry.

The possible enforcement options that have come forward from the Commission have been highlighted. Five options were listed. One was a derogation from the implementation directive for a period for non-compliant countries. Minister, I appeal to you that that must be resisted at all times. It must be fought against because it would be disproportionately unfair to our UK and Northern Ireland producers, as all other member states have had 13 years to comply with the regulation. To take Mr Allister's example one step further, I have been made aware of cages being taken out of hen houses across the UK and going to another EU member state within the past two years. That was not outside compliance with the directive. I think that Mr McMullan mentioned briefly the possibility of a new code 4 to distinguish illegal eggs. Do we truly expect somebody who produces eggs illegally to comply with legislation that would mark them as illegal?

The Commission also suggested an official list of non-compliant producers. The Minister said that we could stop purchasing eggs from producers on that list. It is a big threat from Europe to have your name put on a list, but what would happen to the second-party and third-party sellers? Anybody could end up on the supply producers' list. I have seen that happen with the application of a number of EU regulations. They have been bent as well.

Increased inspection was also highlighted. The Minister referred to ultraviolet inspection. Given the poor state of the data available from the Commission — we already know the countries that will not be compliant — we seriously doubt that any enforcement method that relies on that sort of inaccurate data would be effective. The Minister is taking legal advice, but the only option that is truly available to us is an intra-community trade ban. We support the calls for such a ban on the export of shell eggs. More importantly, we should not forget about egg products from non-compliant egg producers. We ask you, Minister, to call on and work with the Commission to initiate infraction proceedings against member states whose cage egg producers will be non-compliant once the directive comes into force on 1 January.

We had to face fines of over £80 million for infractions and non-compliance with EU regulations. Let the law apply to all EU states. Time is of the essence, and I encourage the Minister to do all she can to protect our egg industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that the welfare of laying hens directive is to come into effect from January 2012; recognises that the introduction of a ban on the use of battery cages has led to significant modifications on many farms; notes with concern that one third of Europe's egg industries will not be compliant with the new regulations by January 2012; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how she will ensure that Northern Ireland's egg producers will not be disadvantaged by cheaper imports which derive from non-compliant producers.

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Portavogie: Regeneration

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Miss M McIlveen: I have been a passionate advocate for the people of the Ards peninsula since being elected to the Assembly in 2007. I am a regular visitor to all parts of the peninsula and have an office and surgeries there. I am particularly struck by the condition of Portavogie village and the concerns of its inhabitants. I have always felt a warm welcome from the people of Portavogie, despite my being a townie from the northern part of the constituency. They are a proud, hard-working people who want nothing more than to earn a wage from an honest day's labour.

I tabled the topic for debate because of my serious concerns about the prospects for future generations of residents in Portavogie, given the decline in the fishing industry in recent years as a result of the fishing quotas that have been imposed on the Northern Ireland fishing fleet. According to figures from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Northern Ireland fleet comprises 376 vessels. According to the Anglo North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation (ANIFPO), 140 vessels sail out of the three main commercial ports of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel, fishing mainly for prawns. Two vessels seasonally target Irish Sea herring, while a small fleet of semi-pelagic trawlers target white fish, and a small boat targets herring on the Mourne shore. That is a significant drop, given the numbers that operated in 1985, when the fishing fleet was at its peak in Northern Ireland. There has been a 25-year wind-down of the industry, which was imposed by Brussels after 12 years of significant investment by the then EEC.

There has been some good news this year for Northern Ireland and Portavogie's fishing industry. Quayside prices are up for the prawn catch, which means that fisherman have been able to keep pace with increases in overhead costs such as fuel. Given the careful management of resources, a 12-month fishery will be maintained for most species except, most notably, cod. There has been some investment in the industry, assisted by the DARD-administered European Fisheries Fund (EFF), although there is quite a degree of frustration in the industry about the fund's administration. Local fishermen have voluntarily introduced a range of technical conservation measures that are designed to reduce discards, thereby answering unjust criticism.

I want to mention the work of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, which continues to deliver practical assistance to all fishermen. In Portavogie, the mission will soon be opening a facility to help immigrant fishermen. Those proactive steps, delivered with the help of the fishing industry, should be recognised and applauded. However, it is not all good news.

The debate is timely because this is the time of year when the EC annually undermines confidence in the industry. There are proposals to reduce total allowable catch (TAC) for, in particular, prawns by 19% and haddock, plaice and herring by 25%. Such cuts in quota combined with a further reduction in days at sea will have a devastating impact on the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. The proposals flow from the EU's long-term cod recovery regulation that, according to EC scientists, has failed to deliver, and yet the EC continues with even deeper cuts. The problem could be further exacerbated, as the EC is seeking to claw back additional effort from the UK/NI fleet over and above the 25% cut that it wants to impose in 2012. It argues that the UK allocated too much effort as part of article 13 buy-backs, which is why additional technical measures were adopted by the fleet to avoid cod.

The EC argues that the UK was too generous with the additional days allocated to the fleet and now wants to take them back. I know that the Minister travelled to Brussels with other UK representatives yesterday to meet the commissioner, and I would welcome an update on that in her response.

5.45 pm

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Miss M McIlveen: I really do not have the time.

Obviously, all of that is very relevant to the issues around Portavogie.

The EC has proposed a zero quota for cod in 2012 despite acknowledging that there are data gaps in the science. Those data gaps cannot be filled unless fish can be landed to provide positive evidence. There are also proposals from the EC to impose emergency technical conservation measures to reduce discards. The industry shares the wish to minimise discards, but it is opposed to measures being imposed on Northern Ireland's and Portavogie's fishermen that have not been proven to work in our fisheries. Rather, the industry wants to trial ideas that have been developed specifically for fisheries in the Irish Sea. It is another sore point that an EFF application for such trials was with DARD for more than 12 months. After many delays, the application was approved on 9 November. However, it took DARD nearly four weeks to draft a letter of offer for the project, despite the urgency of the problem and especially in the light of the latest EC proposals. For the industry, that situation highlights a growing perception that DARD is trailing behind in promoting and assisting the local industry.

Additionally, during 2011 we have seen English-based proposals for a series of marine conservation zones in the Irish Sea. We are glad that the Minister shares local industry concerns that decisions on the English proposals should not be made in isolation from other management measures, as those proposals would effectively remove 20% of the local fleet's main prawn fishing ground in the Irish Sea. A job of work remains to be done on that.

Can the Minister advise when she will make an announcement on a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme, discussions on which have been dragging on for a considerable time? That would be a positive announcement that the fishing industry in Portavogie and along the rest of the County Down coast would welcome. Can the Minister also advise what discussions her Department has had with the Northern

Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority about progressing harbour works around Portavogie harbour? Recent problems with the delivery of ice from the harbour authority's ice plant underscore concerns about the infrastructure at the harbour.

The fishing industry faces challenges from a variety of points, but, where there are challenges, there can be opportunities. The fishing industry in Portavogie has always evolved in response to developments and challenges, and it always will. Fishing is at the heart of Portavogie's fabric, and, as it changes, so does the village. What plans can the Minister announce under axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund about investment in the development of Portavogie? Although the debate is not about the fishing industry but about the regeneration of Portavogie, such is Portavogie's utter reliance on the industry that it is impossible to discuss regeneration without first putting into context the problems that the village's primary employer faces.

The area was first settled in and around 1555. As part of the James Hamilton estate of 1606, it was settled largely by fishermen from the Solway coast. In 1955, a new harbour was constructed that was developed further in 1975 and 1985. Given that rich history and the significant investment that went into the fishing industry in Northern Ireland from 1973 until the mid-1980s, it is not surprising that there is a generational reliance on the industry in the area.

In 1991, the number of fishermen in Northern Ireland stood at 1,369, but, by 2009, that number had collapsed to 654. Portavogie, as Northern Ireland's second largest port, undoubtedly bore a huge proportion of that fall. The impact of that was felt beyond those on the boats, including not just those who worked in fish processing but those involved in marketing, harbour jobs, boat building and chandlery supplies. Unsurprisingly, the numbers employed in the industry continued to fall during the recent recession, and that has been compounded by increasing overheads brought about by the rapid rise in the price of fuel, for example. Portavogie's historical link to the fishing industry is such that the village has grown up around it, and it could be argued that there is an over-reliance on it that is not seen in any other of the commercial ports in Northern Ireland. The fishing restrictions that have been imposed and the reductions in the size of the fleet have had a devastating impact on the village and its surrounding satellites, such as Ballyhalbert.

Earlier in 2011, it was announced that the Euro Shellfish plant in the village would close, with the loss of 30 jobs. That factory had supplied the wholesale and food service sector for more than 25 years. The announcement followed job losses in the sector in recent years following the closure of other fish processors, such as Middleton's and Navatal.

Although takings on the catch cover recent increases in overheads, they still start from a low point as regards profit. That has hit deckhands hard, with reported earnings being around £150 per week. Figures from NISRA for 2011 show that there are 110 people on jobseeker's allowance in the ward. That represents an increase from 29 in 2008. There are 138 people on income support, 165 on incapacity benefit and 66 on employment and support allowance. It is worth noting that those who are still employed in the industry are on very low incomes. NISRA figures for other benefits paid show that there are 570 recipients of DLA, 181 receive carer's allowance and 153 receive attendance allowance. In the area, 795 people are in receipt of multiple

disability benefit, and 20 receive severe disablement allowance. Unemployment is particularly prevalent in Portavogie among males between 16 and 34 years of age.

I will put those figures into context. The village of Portavogie has an estimated population of around 2,042, with the ward having around 4,826 inhabitants. Therefore, we are talking about a significant proportion of the population either surviving on benefits or on a very low income. With greater restrictions on fishing to come, it is envisaged that the situation will only get worse. In 2010, only 19 jobs in Portavogie were notified in jobcentres. On a slightly brighter note, there were eight participants from Portavogie in Invest NI's enterprise development programme, of whom seven started new businesses. That is an increase from one participant in the previous year. Unfortunately, however, we are unaware of the location of those businesses, the number of employees or their proposals for and prospects of survival.

There is no escaping the fact that Portavogie needs regeneration. It is not simply a matter of giving it a lick of paint and erecting a few nice signs. Business diversification is needed. I am in the village weekly. It strikes me that it is a village that has had the wind taken out of it. It has not come to terms with restrictions placed on it by the EC. It needs investment and guidance. A vibrant, successful Portavogie can have knock-on benefits for the rest of the peninsula's towns and villages, such as Ballyhalbert, Cloughey, Ballywalter, Kircubbin and Greyabbey.

According to a survey commissioned by Ards Borough Council, retail provision in the village consists of one general shop, a pharmacy and a post office. Incredibly, there is no bakery or fruit and veg shop. That is totally insufficient for a population the size of Portavogie's. It suggests that there is doubt about the sustainability of businesses in the village and that there has been historical lack of diversity in businesses.

Although there is significant tourist traffic along the Ards peninsula, Portavogie does not seem to capitalise on it in the same way that other towns do, such as Greyabbey. I was pleased to hear that an application has been submitted for work on the Portavogie promenade, a scheme for which I have pressed for some time. Hopefully, it will be a success and prove to be beneficial to the village. However, there is a need for Portavogie to tap into its natural attractions and benefit from potential tourism spend. For that, there needs to be a co-ordinated approach and a focused vision for the village. It is not possible for matters simply to be left to develop in the hope that there will be a positive outcome. Strategic vision needs to come from DARD.

Although there has been significant development in housing in the village, there are many vacant properties and a number of boarded-up homes. It was hoped that there would be most activity on the Harbour Road, which could become the heart of the village. However, unfortunately, there are many boarded-up properties there. It is indicative of the lack of vibrancy in the village, a fact that has been acknowledged by many local people. There is an evident, almost palpable need for action to be taken. Indeed, if any other centre of population had lost in excess of 60 businesses, a task force would be set up to look at and address the problem.

I thank the Minister for attending the debate. I know that she has been busy already this week with negotiations on fishing that will impact on Portavogie. I welcome any

views that she has on the regeneration of the village, particularly with regard to a task force to assess options for diversification and to take the lead in developing a vision for the village to create sustainable jobs, rejuvenate the village and tap into its tourist potential, which would have wider benefits for the entire Ards peninsula.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for bringing a focus to Portavogie this evening. I very much welcome being able to say a few words. I offer, as I did on the day of the election, to work with colleagues in the House who represent the Strangford constituency to do all that we can to regenerate and revitalise villages such as Portavogie.

I will come to Portavogie slightly circuitously, if I may. I begin by suggesting that Northern Ireland's economic success has always been built on picking sectors. In our golden era, those sectors were shipbuilding, agrifood, fisheries, the linen business and the rope works. I was glad that, when the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment published the draft economic strategy two weeks ago, there was once again a focus on the need to pick the sectors that are most likely to boost our economy and a focus on upskilling our workforce. Picking the sectors and upskilling go together; they are two halves of one whole.

We need a modern spin that will benefit the likes of Portavogie. If I may, I want to reference Harland and Wolff for one moment. The modern spin there is the Paint Hall, which has reinvented itself as a centre for the creative industries, a modern spin on manufacturing. Of more relevance to Portavogie is the huge investment by Danish Offshore Natural Gas (DONG), the Danish company that will be getting involved in offshore renewables here. The Belfast Harbour Commissioners are to build a multimillion-pound logistics terminal to service DONG when it gets up and running, and it would be to the benefit of Portavogie and the whole Ards peninsula if we were to create a renewables corridor, running from Belfast harbour down through Newtownards and along the Ards peninsula. On the way through Newtownards, you pass the South Eastern Regional College campus, where they have an environmental skills centre, and I was delighted to learn that the college had attended a recent supply chain event run by DONG. That has led to a liaison and, hopefully, the potential for skills training and new jobs in Portavogie, as we try to cash in on the rich vein that renewables will offer Northern Ireland in the future. We have an opportunity to revitalise the fishing fleet and to transform it, to some extent, into a logistics fleet that will be part of the supply chain that services DONG in the Irish Sea.

That is not to say that we do not need to keep a fishing fleet. Indeed, I would like to thank my colleague Councillor Angus Carson from Ards Borough Council, who will attend the first meeting of the Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) tomorrow. That is an initiative that has come from the Minister's Department, and I wish them well in their endeavours as they look at new possibilities that will perhaps include an enhanced fishing opportunity for boats of less than 10 m in our inshore waters.

We also look forward to the review of the EU common fisheries policy. I was struck by the profession by the Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Maria Damanaki, who is from Greece, of her knowledge of and sympathy for small-scale fishermen. She also expressed a desire for regionalisation as the common fisheries policy

moves forward; in other words, she realises that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. I was also struck by an article that the commissioner wrote, entitled 'Learning from our Mistakes'. In it, she describes having visited a small Greek island where there had once been a significant small-scale fishing fleet, which has now been scrapped. She wrote that that had followed the adoption of the latest reform of the EU common fisheries policy in the 1990s, hence the title of her piece. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past. The Commissioner writes:

"I believe that small-scale fishermen greatly contribute to the economic progress and the preservation of distinctive social and cultural characteristics of European coastal communities."

She goes on to write that she is committed that:

"the new reform of the common fisheries policy shall provide the framework to safeguard their role and reward those who value sustainability" .

Most encouragingly of all, she writes that:

"We have to turn from building bigger and bigger vessels to the care of our fisheries communities."

I very much welcome a renewed focus on communities as well as actual vessels.

6.00 pm

I also welcome, and commit myself to working for, social cohesion in Portavogie. I want to address the real concerns of the people there. One of the benefits of a debate like this is that constituents contact us. One contacted me to ask me to raise the issue of the long-promised walkway from The Quays towards Rataalla and Cloughey, which was proposed a few years ago by the council but opposed by environmentalists. The constituent said:

"Trail bikers and scramblers are churning up the area, wrecking the ecology of the area. We have foxes, badgers and many ground-nesting seabirds here. The scramblers will ensure they leave the area and bikes will cause distress to walkers too."

Again, there is praise for my colleague Councillor Carson, who intervened last spring, but it appears that the bikers are back and have destroyed age-old paths used by fishermen and walkers for over 100 years. It seems to me that that is the sort of initiative on which MLAs and councillors can work together to develop solutions and joined-up politics that will make a real impact. As my colleague Miss McIlveen said, there is every need for intervention. She has defined the problems, and, hopefully, tonight we will start looking at the solutions.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to Michelle McIlveen for bringing this problem to the Assembly. Unfortunately, she has said all that I was going to say, so I will cut my speech down a wee bit as far as I can. I am also grateful that we have a Minister, Michelle O'Neill, present to hear and, hopefully, respond positively to the needs of a small community which is situated on the Irish Sea coast on the Ards peninsula. I do not know whether the Minister has been down in Portavogie, but I extend a very cordial welcome to her and invite her to join us at her earliest convenience to see what we are talking about this evening.

I am the third contributor to the debate this evening, and there is not a great deal left to add to what has already been said. However, I give my wholehearted support to any initiative that would return economic prosperity to what was once a real, lively, busy, thriving and proud fishing village, where the men were out on the boats and the women and young people had work in the various processing plants in the village, all contributing to a good economic community in Portavogie. I was born and reared a wheen of miles fae Portavogie and know local people through family, work and sporting connections. It was in that environment that I gained my football skills, playing with Frankie Mahood, Joe Mawhinney, Bert McMaster, the Cullys, the Coffeys, the Keenans and the McCormacks, all of whom were born and reared in the village of Portavogie.

I can tell Members that fishing is a hard and tough life, but in times past there was money to be made, and families did well until a number of years ago when, as Michelle McIlveen said, restrictions, rules and regulations from outside, probably from the EU, were forced on the industry, and it has been in a downward spiral ever since. Indeed, it continues in that direction. God only knows what further decimation will come from the December discussions in Brussels.

I am sure that other Members will join me in wishing Michelle O'Neill every success in her upcoming talks in Brussels as part of the delegation that will fight our corner. I was part of a Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) delegation recently in Brussels, where I met officials, including Commissioner Damanaki. We got a good hearing and sympathy, but very little optimism about the future. Again, very recently, our Committee met our equivalents from across the border. They expressed sympathy for our plight; they also have to fight for a decent industry. They offered to help and co-operate where that was possible.

I pay tribute to the local Portavogie community through its action group and others, including Dick James and Alan McCullough, who represent the fishing industry. They are all working, hopefully, to make a better life for the people in the village. I also pay tribute to Ards Borough Council, of which I am a member. Through its development committee, it looks at ways and means of securing sustainable development for Portavogie.

I have said on many occasions, and with the support of local people, that immediate action and support is required urgently; otherwise, we will lose our fishing industry altogether. The industry is heading in that direction as we speak and will continue to do so unless something is done.

Portavogie is a unique little place. It does not have a high street or a main street, just a number of roads leading in and out of the village. It has very little retail activity. Thankfully, as Michelle said, it still has a well-run post office and pharmacy. Let us hope that those basic facilities remain. We do not have a GP surgery and things that other communities have, but the pharmacy and post office provide an excellent service for the community. We have a supermarket and a very popular restaurant, the Quays, and I encourage anybody who is in the village to frequent the Quays and you will be assured of an excellent supper, dinner or whatever you go in for. In days gone by, we had three or four drapery shops, three or four grocery shops, and a hardware store. They are all gone.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

We all know that the rural transport budget was reduced recently because of cutbacks, and people have to travel to other villages. Young people in Portavogie see little or no future in the fishing industry, and they go off to colleges and universities never to return. I pay tribute to the Agriculture Department, along with Ards Borough Council, for its support for Portavogie some time ago through the fishing village initiative, and to the IFI and other funders for supporting the provision of a modern community centre with a park and play area. However, work and training need to be directed into Portavogie to compensate for the loss of the fishing jobs. All our peninsula villages have suffered. We never had a huge factory, but we had a very vibrant and busy construction industry until the banks pulled the plug; and the sooner we get back to building new homes, for which there is demand, the sooner we can get skilled tradesmen back to work.

In conclusion, I am prepared, as representative, to work with others from Portavogie along with Assembly colleagues, council colleagues and the Department at Stormont to regenerate Portavogie and all the other areas, and I hope that that is done sooner rather than later.

Mr Hamilton: I begin by thanking and congratulating Michelle on securing the Adjournment debate this evening and for the opportunity that it has presented to her and her colleagues to highlight the need for the multifaceted regeneration of Portavogie.

As Michelle said, this debate is not about the fishing industry per se, but fishing is inherent in any discussion about Portavogie, which is so tied to the industry that you cannot talk about the village and its future without discussing the fishing industry. The decline in the fishing industry, which we all know all about, is much more marked in Portavogie than it is in Northern Ireland's other fishing towns and villages. I know a lot about Ardglass because that is where my mother's side of the family is from, and whilst its fishing industry has declined over the years as well, it has managed to use its tourism potential, capitalised on through the development of a small marina in the village, to weather some of the worst aspects of the decline in the fishing industry. Kilkeel is another matter altogether. If Jim Wells were here, he would probably lament many aspects of its decline, but it is much bigger in area, and it had other industries on which it was dependent.

As Members, including the proposer of the debate, have said, Portavogie, on the other hand, has very little beyond fishing to depend on and to gain income and a sense of community spirit from. The whole decline in the fishing industry has been much more marked there, and it is not just about the loss of boats and fishing and the direct impact on those in the fishing industry and those out on the seas. It has an impact on those in engineering, supplies, local shops and in the processing sector as well.

There are two parts to the regeneration of Portavogie, the first being the regeneration of the fishing industry.

I do not want to go through all the problems that other Members rehearsed about the crippling impact on Portavogie of the restrictions that the EU has placed on the industry. I look forward to any update that the Minister can give us about what the future may hold, although, at this time of the year,

there is always a fear of a bleak future for the fishing industry in the Portavogie area and, indeed, other ports.

The Minister will be aware that there is a real sense of frustration among fishermen in Portavogie and elsewhere that what is regarded as their Department is not always seen to stand up and fight for their interests as much as they believe it should. That perception is widespread across the industry; fishermen have not always viewed the Department as being on their side. I appreciate that the Department is tied in much of what it can do and that Europe hands things down to it that it must implement; however, the Department needs to get behind the industry.

There is an industry to get behind. Many people will talk about the fishing industry in Northern Ireland as having seen better days and as, to use that awful phrase, a "sunset industry". I know, and others should appreciate, that there is huge potential in the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. Our fishermen are catching produce that is exported around the world and which has massive potential. There is a niche market for it. It is sold to restaurants in London and other cities around the world, including in the Far East and elsewhere. Europe produces many threats to the fishing industry, but, through the huge market with which Europe provides us, there is also an opportunity. I have pestered the Minister and her predecessor about protected geographical indications. It strikes me that the produce that comes out of Portavogie, not least prawns, is ripe for seeking such a designation, which would give it an additional marketability around the world that could provide at least something to bolster, underpin and show a confidence in the industry that it should have.

As Michelle outlined, there is also a need for a physical regeneration of Portavogie, and the two are interrelated; the decline in the fishing industry has led to a decline in the physical infrastructure around Portavogie. That has been seen in the closure of shops and other businesses and the decay in many parts of the village. It is sad to see how it has declined over the years from the vibrant town that Kieran McCarthy outlined to what it is today. It is as if the confidence has been sapped out of the town.

The people of Portavogie are looking for their Department and all of us in Stormont and, indeed, in local government to get behind the village and fight for it. There is an industry there that can be salvaged. It may not get back to what it once was, but there is the potential for something, and there is a requirement for the clear decay in the village to be addressed. I appreciate that physical regeneration in the sense of what the Department for Social Development (DSD) does is not DARD's first priority, but, as much as we want to fight for the regeneration of the industry, you must have physical regeneration as well. The rural hinterland around Portavogie depends on the town; if the town is strong and vibrant, the hinterland will thrive as a result.

I welcome the opportunity to talk about these issues, and I hope that, in the Minister's response, she can highlight how she sees her Department playing a role, how, no matter what Europe throws at us, we can bolster and support the industry and, by doing that, how Portavogie can be regenerated.

Mr Bell: I add my congratulations to my DUP colleague Michelle McIlveen for securing the debate on this vital issue. I welcome the presence of the Minister and her attention

to detail, not only on this matter but on the fishing industry in general. That builds on the work of Michelle Gildernew before her.

Minister, from wearing another hat, I understand and appreciate that you rearranged your diary considerably to allow you to be in Brussels in the past few days. The debates there run to 3.00 am, and you are dealing with hundreds of millions of people across the European Union. It is vital that you take to Europe a local issue that affects just over 2,000 people. The 2001 census showed that 1,594 people lived in Portavogie, so there has been an increase of between 450 and 500 people in the past 10 years. It is small in comparison with what some of those commissioners are dealing with in Europe, but I can tell you that the fishing industry is absolutely massive for local people and those in secondary industries whose livelihoods depend on it. In many cases, there is a single breadwinner involved in the fishing industry, so entire families and extended families are dependent on it.

6.15 pm

Portavogie has a rich history. If you go back to 1555, Stable Hole, just north of what is now Portavogie, was the first settlement there. The Ulster-Scots tradition there has made a huge contribution not only there but right across the Ards peninsula and further afield.

I do not believe that it is all doom and gloom. However, the fishing industry there has suffered in not only the ways mentioned but also with the cost of fuel and the cost of running the industry. That has put huge pressure on fishermen and their families and has had a huge impact on their mental health as they worry about their future and whether they will be able to sustain their livelihoods. Many people are entirely dependent on the fishing industry and do not have a secondary skill to fall back on. Fishing is what they saw they were going to do, what they saw their fathers doing and what they wanted to do themselves.

I appreciate, as was mentioned, all the Christian work that has been undertaken by not only the missionary societies but also St Andrew's. Mind you, Portavogie was known as a Presbyterian village because of all the fishermen who were Covenanters. Portavogie was a strategic defence area because of the Ards peninsula and its rich supply of food.

I congratulate the Minister on what she, and Arlene Foster in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), have been doing in the push for the agrifood industry, which is actually outperforming all other areas. It is a huge growth area and one that we would like to see progressed. Portavogie has a key role to play in the agrifood industry, and hopefully we can buck the trend of economic recession that is there.

With some 20% of its young people under 16 years of age according to the last census, we have a big job to do to make sure that people have not only the skills needed if they choose the fishing industry but the skills needed to match the new industries. In our Programme for Government, the tourism industry is absolutely key. Portavogie has it naturally. It has the breathtaking views and the restaurant on the quays, where, the last time I attended, you could not get a table on a Saturday night; it was just booked out completely. It is hugely successful. So Portavogie has a lot to offer. There are the royal links from

when Princess Anne opened the harbour and, subsequently, the community centre.

We need to ensure that the young people there have real and viable opportunities. I am going to go slightly off the subject of the fishing industry and into the environmental sector. I recently looked at South Eastern Regional College's new facility that can take cold air and operate almost like a refrigerator in reverse to provide heating. Key new industries are being developed and it is important that our young people in Portavogie get the skills for employment and to make them employable into the new year.

I met representatives from the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium today and asked them specifically about Portavogie, because we have large retail associations and they are contributing. We want to see them contributing and developing the smaller businesses, and that was their golden opportunity as I showed them where their work could have real effect.

Every crisis is an opportunity because the tourism market is opening. When I was in Asia over the summer, they were looking at some 300 million who want to travel to Europe. If we can encapsulate some of that into Northern Ireland, particularly in the next year with the Titanic and everything else, we could bring it all through into the tourism industry.

The greatest asset any place has is its young people. I have a real hope for Portavogie. I saw what even two disabled young people who are now young men did to overcome disability to show what they could do. I was speaking to one of their aunts when doing a surgery on Friday.

I have every belief that Portavogie can develop and ride out the crisis to become once again a vibrant town. The motto of the Trinity Free Presbyterian Church, Hebrews 6:19, states:

"Which hope we have as an anchor".

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I thank Michelle McIlveen for securing the debate and all the Members who contributed. Thanks to Kieran for the invite: I am sure that I will get along to Portavogie in the very near future. I even know where to eat, because you have told us where we should be eating, too. I hope that I will be able to address all the points that have been raised, but if I have left out anything, I will pick up on it afterwards and write to Members.

As has been said, Portavogie historically has had a very strong dependency on the fishing industry for its employment opportunities. Over the past two decades, the industry has faced severely difficult and challenging times as a result of the dwindling fishing opportunities and the increase in operational costs, both of which have led to a contraction in the number of vessels that operate from Portavogie.

Fishing opportunities are not as varied as in the past, and we are now very heavily dependent on our prawn fisheries. We must ensure that that stock continues to be fished sustainably so that it can support the fleet in the years ahead. We must also improve the profitability of the fleet so that our fishermen can have confidence to invest in their futures and so that young people will also feel attracted to the industry as a career.

My Department has been involved in a range of programmes since the early 1990s. As I only have 10 minutes, I will not go into them all. There has been the fishing villages initiative, the Fishing Villages Task Force and a number of other different initiatives down through the years. The main opportunity, looking to the future, will be through axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF). That will be the best opportunity for community-based regeneration support over the next four years.

Axis 4, in many ways, is similar to the previous Fishing Task Force programme. It is a bottom-up initiative, and a fisheries local action group, to which Mike Nesbitt referred, will comprise a range of social partners and will be established to develop and oversee the implementation of a sustainable development strategy. Hopefully, that is a move towards what Michelle McIlveen outlined when she talked about a task force and moving forward. That group will be key to Portavogie, which is an area that is very dependent on the fisheries.

That approach will involve people who are best placed to know the needs of the area and how to maximise the benefits for the community from the funding that is available. I have earmarked a total of £3 million of European and matching funding for the strategy, so at least there is funding to take a strategy forward. Hopefully, that is a good starting point.

My Department is working with council officials on setting up the fisheries local action group and establishing a lead partner. Progress is being made, and it is hoped that a meeting will be convened very soon. As Mike said, that is happening over the next number of weeks. That will be a good opportunity to commence the process of developing the sustainable development strategy, and it is anticipated that axis 4 will open for applications early in the next financial year.

It is also vital to the success of axis 4 and the wider regeneration of Portavogie that all stakeholders express their ideas and opinions as part of the consultation process associated with developing the strategy. I take this opportunity to appeal to all stakeholders to make sure that they fully participate in the process and make sure that their views are known.

We are very fortunate in central government that local government and the private and voluntary sectors have experience in delivering socio-economic programmes dedicated to fishing-dependent communities. Their continuing participation is required to ensure the benefits from EFF and other funding be maximised in our fishing communities.

The initial proposals for European funding for the fishing industry post-EFF have just been published, and the Commission is providing a strong focus on the continuation of community-led, socio-economic support through the new European and Maritime Fisheries Fund. The process that is currently being earmarked through axis 4 will therefore continue into the next round of European funding.

As Members said, I was in Brussels yesterday. I urgently sought a meeting with Commissioner Damanaki. I went out with Richard Benyon from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Richard Lochhead from Scotland, because the Commission was proposing a regulation that would have had a devastating impact on Portavogie and all our fishing industry.

Thankfully, that regulation has now been taken off the table to allow for more conversation and for me to work with the industry here. I will have to keep engaging with the Commission on that, because if the regulation were to go ahead, it would be catastrophic for our industry. So, we are fighting very strongly with the Commission on that. We got some positive vibes. We will have to work with the Commission to make sure that we get that right.

We are back in Brussels next week for the December Fisheries Council meeting — a dance that DARD has to take part in every year with the Commission in respect of our next year's quotas. It will be very challenging; there is no doubt about that. We are starting off with very deep cuts. The Commission is proposing a 19% cut for the nephrops fleet. Our fleet could not sustain that. We are fishing sustainably, and the Commission needs to recognise that. We have a big job ahead to get the Commission to think our way. We will be putting the case strongly that there should be a rollover in respect of the catch, as opposed to the 19% that the Commission is proposing. We also have concerns about the proposed 25% cut in respect of our sea herring. Those are all the issues that will be under intense negotiation next week when we argue our case. We have been to date, but, next week, it gets to the intense stage where we have the opportunity to get the best deal that we possibly can for our local industry.

The decommissioning scheme was raised. I want to move that forward as quickly as possible, but it is certainly a complex issue. On the one hand, the fishing industry wants the decommissioning scheme to be moved forward; on the other hand, the processing sector is worried about how that will impact on the stocks that it has coming in. Therefore, you have to get a balanced approach. That is what I have been doing and that is why the decision on the way forward has been delayed. However, I am pleased to say that the business case is well advanced, and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on the way forward at some time in the next four weeks. We had to have it cleared by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Hopefully, that will be resolved in the next four weeks.

I think that it was Michelle who raised the point about the delay on the EFF trial of gear. I appreciate the fact that there has been a delay in approving the project. There have been issues around clarifying the project's objectives and putting in place scientific project management to ensure that results can be used to persuade the Commission that that was a good way to go. So, at least, we can say now that the matter has been resolved and the project is going to proceed.

You asked about the timescales for implementing axis 4 of the EFF. I am glad to advise that the evaluation that we were taking forward has now been completed. It will be a valuable source of information when the new fisheries local action group is established, and it will give the group a focus for moving forward. That is positive.

Renewables potential was also raised. Absolutely — the offshore energy potential is there. It is the responsibility of DETI, but, obviously, it will impact on the fishing industry that I represent. I hope that the fishermen will take up those opportunities. I know from discussions that I have had with them that they are up for that and are actively involved. That is all good potential for the future that we are looking towards for the industry.

Some concerns about the operation of Portavogie harbour were raised. If you have anything particular or specific there, you might want to raise it with the harbour authority initially. I am happy to be part of any correspondence on that.

I hope that I have picked up on the main points raised in the debate. If there is anything else, officials will have picked up on it, and I am happy to write to Members. It is a very challenging time for the fishing industry. The December Fisheries Council meeting is a key time. It is a really worrying time for fishermen. They are worried about what their catch for next year will be and their days at sea and effort and all the rest of it. We have to keep working with the industry. We have to keep going to Europe, and we have to keep putting the strongest case possible.

Adjourned at 6.30 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 December 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

EU Summit: December 2011

Mr Speaker: Ms Margaret Ritchie has sought leave to make a statement on the withdrawal from the EU summit agreement, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Ms Ritchie to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call a representative from each of the other parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. There will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or for a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until this item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Ms Ritchie: The unilateral decision of the Prime Minister to veto any prospective new European treaty aimed at achieving greater financial stability across the euro zone is regrettable. Not only did Mr Cameron appear to fail to consult his coalition partners, but, more importantly from our perspective, he failed to consult any of the devolved institutions despite the fact that his actions could have profound implications for those jurisdictions.

Northern Ireland has a land border with the euro zone — with the South of Ireland — and therefore we are entitled to be consulted about any UK Government action that fundamentally impacts on the UK's relationship with the euro zone. Anything short of that is, frankly, disrespectful. My colleague Alex Attwood has already indicated that he is raising the matter with ministerial colleagues in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) with a view to liaising with the Scottish and Welsh Governments in order to bring about direct discussions with the Prime Minister on this matter.

The motivation behind the decision to exercise the veto is also regrettable. I suspect that Mr Cameron took that decision primarily to appease hardliners on the Tory Back Benches rather than out of any UK interest. After all, the central proposition in the new treaty — that Governments will be required by law to run balanced Budgets — would apply only to euro zone members, not to the UK. That is why the nine members that, like the UK, are inside the EU but outside the euro zone could comfortably accept it. The result is that Mr Cameron's most disloyal Back-Benchers are temporarily appeased, but the UK and, by extension, ourselves are once again out on a limb, isolated in Europe. That isolation could have profound consequences.

What happens if the euro zone stability pact is successful and the markets shift focus from the Greeks, Italians and Portuguese? The markets could then turn their remorseless attention to another country with sky-high indebtedness and no economic growth. What country is that? Britain and Northern Ireland. You heard it here first. If that happens, the UK could find itself facing a possible flight from sterling. In such circumstances, the UK would find itself without friends, with sentiment running against it and an immediate requirement to hike interest rates.

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

Ms Ritchie: There is absolutely no doubt that that would have detrimental economic and financial consequences for every citizen in the North of Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive is duty bound to act without delay with the British Prime Minister.

Mr Campbell: The European Union has grown exponentially over the past 40 years. In recent years, we have seen an influx of nation states, many of which have considerable progress to make before they reach a competitive level with other nations. The problem in both the euro zone and the EU is that the one-size-fits-all economic policy has totally and utterly failed, and we have seen numerous bailouts, such as that in Greece, that have not worked. We have seen the run in relation to Italy and possibly Spain and Portugal. Unfortunately, Ms Ritchie appears to avoid looking at the problem rather than looking at the solution. The problem is the nature of the beast in relation to the European Union and the euro zone.

We in this party think that Mr Cameron, the Prime Minister, took the right step so far as it went, in that he has now given the opportunity to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland to make some progress. For example, in recent years, the net contribution to the EU, after moneys that we receive, has varied between £8 billion a year and £11 billion a year. That is a net contribution of £11,000 million a year from the UK Exchequer to the European Union. The Prime Minister has availed himself of an opportunity. He is to be commended for taking that limited opportunity, but it is only a progressive opportunity if we now make the most of it.

The Irish Republic and other nation states will now find that they will have to look at their corporation tax and VAT rates, so there is the opportunity for this nation state to lower those rates to make this country even more competitive against our competitors in the European Union. The Prime Minister has taken a sensible step, one that is to be warmly commended. I am sure that Ms Ritchie and I, along with others, will take part in the debate in another place

tomorrow, when we will be able to expand on the issue at considerable length.

Hopefully, the nation can make significant progress and realign ourselves as a European nation state but one that keeps control of its economic and political affairs within the nation state that is the United Kingdom.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In the matter under discussion, the issue for the Assembly is that the decisions will not be made here. We are spectators in a much wider debate. The issues clearly have impacts here. There was no consultation on David Cameron's position and his use of the veto. It appears from the evidence that there was not even consideration of the impact on or role of devolved Assemblies. His action was taken for a different purpose and agenda.

We have witnessed a move towards the centralisation of the EU and the decision-making process and a lot of power being taken away from member states. The international economic crisis seems to have created an opportunity for those who would attempt to drive forward that centralisation agenda. There are big issues that affect this island North and South, including loss of sovereignty; loss of control over economic policies; and the fact that two member states now have as their prime minister apparatchiks who were not elected by anyone but were endorsed by the troika. All those issues have to be addressed when people talk about agreeing ways forward on democratic relationships on the wider European mainland and the broader global economic scenario. However, let us not kid ourselves in this debate that any of those decisions will be made by the Assembly.

The obsequious endorsement of David Cameron's position by the party opposite does no good for the economy here. It makes no contribution whatsoever. It simply encourages more of a drift away from the ability to influence decisions that affect our communities.

Mr Elliott: Before I start, I express my sympathy and that of my party to Arlene Foster and her entire family on the sudden death of her father.

The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes David Cameron's veto on any new EU treaty and his decision to keep the United Kingdom out of the economic accord between other EU states. Withdrawing from the EU summit agreement has protected the country's financial services and manufacturing industries and ensured that the United Kingdom remains protected from further EU integration, which is not in our country's interest.

For once, protection of the United Kingdom's interests has been at the forefront of the decision. All of us should welcome that decision. There are also valuable lessons to be learnt from it. While the United Kingdom is not and never has been part of the euro zone, many of the countries that are part of the euro zone were obviously not prepared for it. It has been evident in the past number of months that many of those countries should not have been in the euro zone. The United Kingdom should not be punished for the bad economic decisions of other member states.

The Ulster Unionist Party hopes that, after eight summits, the euro zone countries have now found a solution to their problems. The new accord will leave them at the mercy of Brussels. Budgets will have to be approved by Brussels. If

member states fail to comply, they will face severe fines from the EU institutions. By opting out of that accord, the United Kingdom retains the power to pursue its own monetary and economic policies based on the interests of the United Kingdom, of which, thankfully, Northern Ireland is still very much an integral part. Other member states will now face uncertainty and lengthy negotiations over every budget that they set. The United Kingdom will chart its own destiny.

It has been noted that the United Kingdom remains one of the biggest net contributors to the European Union. I assume that that will not change either, and Northern Ireland should be thankful for that. We benefit from that to some level, although not to the level that the Ulster Unionist Party and I would like. We would obviously be happier if there were much more support for Northern Ireland. However, we welcome the opportunity for the United Kingdom to set its own policies and agendas within the European Union. I welcome that as a member of the United Kingdom.

12.15 pm

Mr Lyttle: I extend my sympathies and those of the Alliance Party to Arlene Foster and her family at this difficult time.

I understand the huge and fundamental economic issues facing the European Union, but I am concerned at the hastiness with which the Prime Minister appears to have taken this decision. I am also concerned at the impact that it could have on UK/EU relations at a time when the Assembly is working hard to improve our interaction with Europe to get the best deals possible for local people. Those deals could be on common agricultural policy reform, R&D funding for our small and medium-sized enterprises and the further education and higher education sectors. With Peace III funding coming to an end, we are looking to request Peace IV funding. Therefore, I await a fuller statement from the Prime Minister on that important issue. However, given his commitment to improving financial regulation in the City of London, it seems strange that he appears to have withdrawn from the talks on EU proposals for stronger financial regulation.

So, what does this mean for Northern Ireland in Europe? Where does it leave Northern Ireland's negotiating position for EU structural funds? Where does it leave us with Peace IV funds? Those are questions that we need to ask the Prime Minister when he makes his statement. I express my concern, as my colleague at Westminster, Naomi Long, has done, about the apparent lack of consultation and inclusion of regional Assemblies in the UK in the types of decision that the UK takes in Europe. I look forward to urgent clarification from the Prime Minister.

Mr Allister: Having witnessed many episodes of humiliating climbdown in Europe, I found it refreshing to see the Prime Minister say no. I trust that he will stand his ground. If other countries want to further surrender sovereignty and subject their budget to the control of the unelected Commission in Brussels and if they want to be subsumed into a greater Franco-German alliance that will rule Europe, that is a matter for them. However, I, for one, am glad that this nation stands outside that, and I trust that we will continue to do so. As events unfold and the euro zone countries become more vengeful towards the United Kingdom, we will see more and more how right was the decision that was taken in the early hours of last Friday morning. We are better off out of this

treaty, and, indeed, we would be better off out of the EU, particularly now that it has moved away from being a single trading entity and a market to being a political and monetary union. That, undoubtedly, is the purpose of the new treaty that has been embraced.

Northern Ireland must now lift its vision in our trading terms above the failing economies of Europe and look to the new, successful economies much further afield. We must make that the central focus of our trading ambitions. I trust that, when the Enterprise Minister — I join other Members in conveying sincere sympathies on the sad loss of her father — gets back to work, it will be a focus of the Department to look at how we can better expand our trading arrangements with the growth economies way beyond Europe rather than with those that would drag us down if we had gone into this treaty in the manner that some foolishly suggest.

Mr Agnew: I, too, express my sympathies to Arlene Foster and her family. Although we may have clashed politically in recent weeks, it is important to separate the political and the personal. I give her my personal condolences and those of my party colleagues.

The Green Party has been what I would describe as a critical friend of the EU project. I think that it has brought many benefits, but today I have to be critical. What we are seeing across Europe with this agreement is an attempt to enshrine a neo-liberal economic agenda. Too often, economics is seen as being politically neutral, when, in fact, it is at the crux of political debate. As has been pointed out by others, this is not a democratic decision. The agreement will put a burden on the countries that signed up to it and are obligated by it and will choose their economic policy for them and, therefore, the policy of their Government, regardless of who is elected.

It appeared to me that David Cameron's walkout from the negotiations smacked more of somebody who had no cards to play. It was grandstanding to keep members of his party happy and, to some extent, to say to the electorate that he is taking a tough line on the issue. The truth is that we have little power in the negotiations. We are not part of the euro. However, in this case, that is to our benefit.

Ultimately, the Green Party believes that this is a bad deal for Europe. Although we may be outside the euro zone, as has been pointed out, it is one of our largest markets and one of our closest geographically, given our border with the Republic. This could seriously damage our trade and have a detrimental effect on the Northern Ireland economy. However, ultimately, in this case, I think that we are better off out than in.

Dr McDonnell: Is it in order for me to express my condolences and those of my colleagues in the SDLP to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, on the sudden death of her father?

Mr Speaker: That is certainly in order. All our thoughts, prayers and sympathies are with the Foster family at this time. He was a father and a grandfather, and I know that I speak for the whole House in sending sympathy to the family at this time.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the outset, on behalf of Sinn Féin, I extend my sympathy to Minister Foster and her family at this difficult time.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement, in compliance with section 52 of the 1998 Act, regarding the recent meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format. The meeting was held in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on Friday 14 October 2011. Nelson McCausland and I represented the Executive, and the Dublin Government were represented by the Minister of State for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Fergus O'Dowd TD. This statement has been agreed with Minister McCausland, and I make it on behalf of us both.

The Council welcomed a progress report on the work of the Loughs Agency, which was presented by the agency's Chairperson, Tarlach O'Crosain, and its chief executive, Derick Anderson. We strongly condemned the continuing attacks on Loughs Agency's staff and on volunteer river watchers and acknowledged their dedication in seeking to detect and prevent illegal fishing activity. I recently wrote to the Justice Minister and the Chief Constable to request a meeting to discuss a united approach and to explore ways of ensuring that Loughs Agency staff can carry out their duties without fear of being attacked. I also recently met some of the staff affected by those attacks, during a visit to the Loughs Agency's headquarters, and was impressed by the commitment that they have to the important work that they continue to do.

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

We discussed the improvement in length frequency of the standing stock of oysters in Lough Foyle and noted that the 2011 salmon counts indicated relatively healthy fish runs in some systems but there are some concerns about others, specifically in the River Mourne.

We also noted and welcomed the significant progress made on the agency's application for INTERREG IVa funding for the integrated aquatic resource management project, along with the University of Glasgow and Queen's University Belfast.

We also heard that approval has been given and contracts have been signed for moorings and pontoons at Meadowbank Quay. Those facilities will play an important part in the visit of the Clipper round-the-world challenge when the event arrives in the Foyle in June 2012.

We welcomed the presentation by the Loughs Agency on the provision of environmental education programmes and noted that such programmes facilitate excellent stakeholder engagement, particularly with young people, and play an important role in changing the mindset of stakeholders about their role in managing the Foyle and Carlingford catchments and ensuring their future sustainability. We were impressed by the range of programmes that the agency provides to its stakeholders, particularly the work that it

is doing with schools in the Foyle and Carlingford areas to inform and educate their younger stakeholders.

We noted with concern a report of an investigation by DARD internal audit of the procurement by the Loughs Agency of its monitoring vessel MMV Ostrea. The report identified significant weaknesses and control issues in the management of the project. We also noted that the report found that there was no evidence of fraudulent activity, that the objectives of the project were achieved and that the finished vessel provides value for money in respect of the current market value of the vessel and its capacity for operational effectiveness. We endorsed the actions taken and the additional controls requested by the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. We also noted that progress on the implementation of the actions arising from the internal audit report will be reported at the next NSMC aquaculture and marine meeting.

We noted the progress on the preparation of the Loughs Agency's 2012 business plan and that the sponsor Departments will continue to work with the agency to finalise the plan and that it will be brought forward for approval before the end of 2011.

We welcomed the progress on the delivery of the Loughs Agency's legislation implementation plan and noted that further regulations will require NSMC approval in 2012. We also approved the Foyle Area and Carlingford Area (Tagging and Logbook) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, which prohibit the possession of forged or altered tags.

Finally, we agreed to meet again in aquaculture and marine sectoral format in February 2012.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for her statement. I note that it was noted that the 2011 salmon counts indicated relatively healthy fish runs in some systems but that there are concerns about others, specifically the River Mourne. What rivers are of concern to the Minister? Is the River Bann included among those rivers? It is a very important river, with fish runs that serve Lough Neagh, which, subsequently, serves a large number of river systems that flow into Lough Neagh.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Member for the question. The River Bann was not discussed as one of the rivers about which there was potential for concern. I am happy to look at that further and respond to the Member in writing if there was concern, but, to my recollection, it was not highlighted as a case for concern.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. The Minister will be aware of a recent fish kill in the Bessbrook river. Will she provide an update on what action is being taken in that regard?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his question. At the meeting, we were pleased to note the agency's advice that the incidence of high-severity pollution was well down on previous years. As the Member highlighted, the only incident that we experienced was the fish kill in the Bessbrook river. It is being investigated by agency staff. I am also pleased to note that all the fish kills that occurred in 2010 have been brought before the courts, and the agency and the partners that are involved have been able to ensure that there have

been convictions for all the polluters. Hopefully, that will act as a deterrent to future potential incidences. The incident at Bessbrook is still under investigation.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement. There were issues surrounding the Loughs Agency's procurement procedures. Can the Minister outline how it is possible that the finished vessel provides value for money, when significant weaknesses were identified in the agency's procurement procedure? What weaknesses were identified?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for her question. Some time ago, an allegation was made about the procurement of the vessel. An internal investigation was carried out. It has taken time, but it is important that we get to the bottom of all the issues that were identified. We decided to go for an internal audit, because we have a strong departmental anti-fraud policy and a good response team in place. It was felt that they were the key people who could take that forward.

12.30 pm

As for the investigation, it is important to underline that no fraudulent activity was found throughout its entirety. However, there were some concerns about the transparency of the relationship between the project manager who was contracted to the agency and the organisation that provided the vessel that came from New Zealand. Those are the key points that were raised.

I hope to be in a position to publish the report in the near future so that everyone can see it. It is important to be open and transparent. However, it is safe to say from talking to the agency that lessons have been learned, and it has put in place an excellent plan to ensure that something like this will not occur again.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her statement. I note that the meeting took place on 14 October. Notwithstanding the fact that the Minister had to attend to business in Brussels at short notice, there has been a two-month interval since the meeting. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

With regard to attacks on Loughs Agency staff and the illegal fishing activity that has been reported, will the Minister give us some indication of the extent of that illegal fishing, the loss of income to the sector and the wider ramifications for the sustainability of the fish stock?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for her question. I was due to make this statement last week, which would have been about six weeks after the NSMC meeting. However, due to an urgent discussion that we had to have with the Commission, I had to go to Brussels. Procedurally, after an NSMC meeting, I make an application to the Speaker to make a statement, and I believe that this was the first date that was available. However, I am happy to look into that to see whether we can report sooner to ensure that the information is relevant and up to date.

I visited the Loughs Agency staff after the NSMC meeting and had a frank discussion with them about what they were experiencing. They were able to show me some of the things that had been fired at them, including bricks. People were lifting anything that could be found around the lough and

firing it at them. At night, staff have to go out with shields to do their work, and that is an unacceptable situation. I put on record that I fully condemn those continuing attacks on staff. When I visited, I was pleased to note that the level of attacks had fallen, but that may be more to do with the salmon season, and it may not have been as attractive to those who were involved in that type of behaviour. I am happy to provide the Member with the figure for loss of income in writing.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. She referred to funding for the integrated aquatic resource management project. Will she expand on those activities and tell us what the management project consists of?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is quite a detailed project about looking for future sustainability in the aquaculture sector. Instead of going through quite a detailed answer now, I will give it to the Member in writing. However, it is all about looking to the future, ensuring that we are sustainable and doing everything to look at the whole habitat. I am happy to pass that information to the Member.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. How important is the approval for new moorings and pontoons at Meadowbank quay? Has she any more details about that and what it will mean for the future?

Mrs O'Neill: It is all about our marine tourism development strategy and, therefore, it is important that the project is taken forward. Along with the work being done on the moorings and pontoons at Meadowbank quay, we heard at the meeting about other projects that the Department has been involved in. However, it is all about marine tourism and ensuring that we attract as many visitors to those areas as possible. That is what that project is all about.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her detailed statement to the House. It is very timely. With regard to the detailed report into the purchasing of the vessel *Ostrea* — one that we all should welcome — is she satisfied that the objective was achieved?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Without going over some of the reasons that I outlined earlier, the most important thing to note is that lessons have been learned. When I put questions at length to the agency at the NSMC meeting, it was quite happy to respond and to give a full account of what it is doing to improve things. There is no doubt that the *Ostrea* is an important resource for the management, conservation and development of sustainable aquaculture and shell fisheries for the future. The objective was achieved. It may have had teething problems but those have been ironed out. We can now look to the future while knowing that the vessel is fit for purpose. It will help conservation in the future.

Lord Morrow: The Minister mentioned the poaching that is going on, and she said that it is difficult to tackle it and protect the safety of those who are involved in enforcement. Does the Minister have any figures to present to the Chamber today to tell us how many people have been brought before the courts for poaching or how many cases are pending?

I would like her to comment further on what she said about the River Mourne. There are concerns about the salmon run

there. I would like to hear what her concerns really are and whether, in fact, the numbers have dropped.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There is no doubt that there have been successful convictions against those involved in attacks on staff and poaching, but, sometimes, the sentences do not reflect the crimes. The staff say that it is the same people who repeatedly come back to engage in poaching. I have written to the Minister of Justice, to Matt Baggott and to the Garda Síochána to discuss in more detail what can be done. If sentencing is not right and does not act as a disincentive, we need to look at a stronger way.

Some fish count figures are higher and some are lower. The River Mourne was pointed out as having a low number of salmon. The agency has set a number of management targets and it is not reaching those targets for the River Mourne. It is trying to see what it can do to improve those levels and what factors are being taken into account, because we are quite concerned about that river. However, we have to keep monitoring all rivers to make sure that the salmon numbers continue at their current level or increase.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Minister. It is widely believed that the nets off the north coast of Northern Ireland are decimating our salmon run. The Republic of Ireland Government moved to remove all salmon nets, and they have done so. Has the Minister had any consultation with her party colleague the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure about the potential for removing the five operational nets that are still off our north coast, which have the potential to affect the salmon run?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. That is not an issue that was discussed at the NSMC but I am happy to look at it. I have not had any discussions to date with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, but if the Member wants to write to me with more detail, I can certainly take it up as an issue.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for her statement. What discussions have taken place in conjunction with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the appropriate Ministers in the South of Ireland on the tourism potential of Carlingford Lough to ensure that we fully explore the full tourism potential for jobs and the economy in that region?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for her question. Tourism potential is not an issue about which I have had any discussions with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I am happy to take that up with Minister Foster. In general, Carlingford is all about the marine tourism strategy. We are actively working jointly to increase that tourism potential.

As the Member will know, the Department is very much involved in the Carlingford oyster festival and heritage week. The agency very much supports that along with Louth County Council and Fáilte Ireland. We will continue to do that. At each meeting of the NSMC, we receive regular updates on the tourism potential around Carlingford and Foyle.

Mr Buchanan: A number of my questions have been answered. I note that the Minister has written to the Chief Constable and the Minister of Justice to arrange a meeting with them. When does she hope to meet them to discuss the attacks on Loughs Agency staff, which is a

very important issue? Something must be put in place, in conjunction with the PSNI and the Justice Minister, to bring about an end to such attacks. What steps is she hoping to take to ensure that that is the case?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for the question. It is important that we have meetings with the Justice Minister, Matt Baggott and an Garda Síochána to discuss the issue in more detail. I made the point earlier that sentencing is not acting as a deterrent because the same people are poaching repeatedly. So, I want to explore that issue in more detail with the Justice Minister.

PSNI and gardaí involvement comes down to operational activity on the ground. I think that we need to have further discussions with both of them, given what Loughs Agency staff have told me about the potential problems that they see and the problems that they deal with every time that they do a night's work. I want to take up those issues with the PSNI and an Garda Síochána because things will not improve until we have better co-ordination.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her statement. I would like to touch on, in a much stronger way, the issue of illegal fishing, which was raised in the statement and in questions. Will the Minister look at putting together a task force and taking a zero-tolerance approach to any form of illegal netting or fishing in Northern Ireland, so that we, through a joint departmental exercise, really do clamp down on the problem?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I think that that is a very good suggestion and I will look at it after my meeting with the Justice Minister, the PSNI and gardaí. It is a good suggestion and I am happy to explore it. I absolutely agree that a zero-tolerance approach should be taken. People, when going out to do a day's work or a night's work, whatever the case may be, should not have to endure the situations that they are finding themselves in. It is a desperate situation when those people have to go out to work with shields over their heads. We, therefore, need to take some effective action.

Mr Allister: Given that the Minister is unable to tell us how many convictions there have been, which is surprising, and that the salmon count in many rivers seems to be falling, is it the case that the Loughs Agency has lost control in respect of fishery management and dealing with illegal fishing? Does the Loughs Agency, for example, visit the fish dealers and make them account for where they acquired their salmon from? Does it visit hotels and restaurants to do the same with them? Who is running the show in that area with regards to fishing? Also, has the disjointed position, where DCAL is responsible for inland waters and the Loughs Agency has a parallel responsibility for others, contributed to that apparent loss of control?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Will the Member ask his question?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am happy to provide details of the actual number of convictions to the House in writing after today's statement. I think that the Loughs Agency does excellent work, and I do not think that anybody can deflect from that. It faces very challenging situations when dealing with poaching, which has been a problem for some time. However, I think that

we need more co-ordination and involvement from everyone concerned to try to stamp out poaching.

The PSNI and gardaí will need to take action, and I will speak to the Justice Minister and work with the Loughs Agency to ensure that it has sufficient capacity to deal with the problem. Its staff are very capable people, who do their job every day in difficult circumstances. The Loughs Agency provides a valuable, key role in protecting and making sure that we have a sustainable fishery. I do not think that you can take away from that in any shape or form. The issue is about what we can do to try to join things up and to make sure that we can stamp out attacks by taking a zero-tolerance approach.

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I wish to make a statement, in compliance with section 52 of the 1998 Act, regarding the sixteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in agriculture sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 26 October.

12.45 pm

The Executive were represented by Minister Edwin Poots MLA and me. The Dublin Government were represented by Simon Coveney TD, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Phil Hogan TD, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. Minister Coveney chaired the meeting. This statement was agreed with Mr Poots, and I am making it on behalf of both of us.

The Council noted and welcomed ongoing cooperation on the rural development programme, including support for cross-border engagement by local action groups. Ministers welcomed the approval of €10 million of INTERREG IVa funding for six strategic cross-border rural development projects.

Ministers received a presentation outlining the work of the project on harnessing natural resources, which was led by the Cavan County Enterprise Board in collaboration with Cavan County Council, Fermanagh District Council, Leitrim County Council, the Swanlinbar Development Association, Coillte and Inland Fisheries Ireland. I recently spoke at the formal launch of that initiative. The project has been awarded over €3 million from the INTERREG programme directly to support rural communities in the Fermanagh, Leitrim and Cavan cross-border region through rural enterprise and tourism schemes.

At the launch, I was impressed by the range of organisations involved in the project, and it was clear to me that it is a model of genuine cross-border partnership. I am pleased that my Department is supporting strategic projects such as that through the INTERREG programme and that it is real evidence of the good work being done at grass-roots level by my officials, in partnership with others, to help rural communities throughout the border region.

The Council noted the ongoing co-operation on approaches to tackling rural poverty and social exclusion. A year 1 independent review of the PEACE III rural enabler project has been undertaken and will shortly be presented to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and the project steering committee.

Ministers noted the publication by the EU Commission of the legislative proposals for the future of the common agricultural policy (CAP), including the alteration of net ceilings for direct payments, changes to the single payment model, a green payment and a capping of large payments, changes to the details of rural development measures, and changes on financial regulations. The Council discussed the CAP reform process, which will involve a debate of the Commission proposals by the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, with the process expected to conclude in agreement before mid-2013.

The Council also noted recent developments in international trade negotiations, particularly that, in the negotiations with the Mercosur group of South American countries, the central issues of tariff liberalisations and market access are not expected to be addressed until mid-2012.

Ministers welcomed the outcome of a joint meeting of the Chief Veterinary Officers and the EU Commission at which the Chief Veterinary Officers set out the case for an all-island animal health and welfare strategy, and the Commission acknowledged the fact that the strategy's aims formed part of the considerations of the new EU animal health law. The Council also welcomed the update report on the delivery of the 2011-12 all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan, including the launch of the first all-island animal disease surveillance report and the agreement of a memorandum of understanding between official laboratories to foster enhanced cooperation and participation in collaborative research. It also welcomed recent developments on animal disease contingency planning, including the agreement of a memorandum of understanding to facilitate the production of maps of disease control zones in the case of an outbreak, and preparations for a further joint mapping exercise on that.

Ministers welcomed the collaboration that has assisted towards proving Aujeszky's disease-free status and agreed that Departments should continue to work closely to ensure that the timing of the submission of applications for Aujeszky's disease-free status is co-ordinated.

The Council looked forward to receiving a further progress report on the delivery of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy at the next NSMC agriculture meeting. It also agreed to hold its next agriculture meeting in January 2012.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome the work being done on animal health and welfare, even though the eradication or reduction of bovine TB is not yet a target in the draft Programme for Government. I say "yet", because I hope that the Minister will look at the issue again.

The Minister should be aware that tomorrow the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development will discuss and seek to agree the terms of a submission to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry on greening the CAP. I hope that we will reach consensus on that submission. I will be suggesting that the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee should seek to give oral evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry to enforce the points in the written submission. If that were to happen, it would, I believe, be the first time that a group of MLAs has gone to Westminster to give evidence to such an inquiry. That is very important, given that when it comes to the CAP that is where Northern Ireland's future will be decided.

I have concerns that there are some politicians in the Republic of Ireland who would seek to change the common agricultural policy to an environmental policy or even a social policy instead of a food production and food security policy. Given the importance of the Republic of Ireland and its forthcoming presidency of the EU, what discussions has the Minister had about the social and environmental issues?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his question. The CAP reform process obviously is a key issue for the industry. I spoke at a launch of a stakeholder event last week where the Department is seeking the views of stakeholders to form a policy that we will take to Europe. I will be interested to see the Committee's signed-off response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Discussions with the South on this issue are ongoing, and it is a regular agenda item at the NSMC meetings in agriculture sectoral format. It is also important that it is on the agenda of the plenary sessions of the NSMC, and we were able to have a discussion about it at the most recent meeting last month.

I have had numerous discussions with Simon Coveney on the various aspects of CAP reform. However, it is important to note that we differ from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) when it comes to the overall budget for agriculture, and we share similar views to the South in its approach to that. This is not a political issue about the South and it having the presidency. The South will be a key ally, and if Simon Coveney and I have similar views, we will argue a similar case in Europe. Those discussions are ongoing. I will continue to talk to Simon Coveney about the greening aspect, given the concerns that the Member raised. I am happy to do that.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Obviously, there is a lot of good work being carried out and a lot of good co-operation on an all-island basis on many themes. Will the Minister give examples of North/South co-operation on research and innovation and the other themes?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There is already a lot of collaboration between the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the universities across the island. At a strategic level, the departmental scientific adviser contributed to the work of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's agri-research expert advisory group. That group has been tasked with developing a strategic agenda for agricultural research in the South. So, through the North/South steering group, we hope to be able to impact on that and get involved in it.

With regard to other areas of North/South co-operation, a number of issues are taken forward on a formal basis, but, outside of that, a number of other issues are taken forward on a less formal basis. Through my North/South unit, we continually work with our counterparts when it comes to flood risk management, potential joint research activities under the rural White Paper, the sustainable development of our forests, training programmes in further and higher education, technology transfer in the food sector, fisheries issues and equine issues. So, there are a number of areas where natural cooperation occurs.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank the Minister for her statement. Will she give an indication as to what form the ongoing approaches to tackling rural poverty and social exclusion outlined in her statement will take and whether they will take account of the specific education needs of rural children?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In the last term, there was an antipoverty and social inclusion framework package of about £10 million, which

was delivered to address rural poverty and social exclusion issues. That was for those aged between eight and nine up to 10 or 11 years. There were five priorities at that time around rural childcare transport, rural fuel poverty, rural community development and a challenge fund for projects that address the wider issues. That work was very successful. I am in the process of scoping the work, taking a look at what was beneficial and moving forward with my new programme. Over the next four years £16 million will be allocated to that programme to continue to tackle all issues of rural poverty, social exclusion and isolation. I hope that I am coming towards a conclusion with that work and that I will be in a position to launch the programme early in the new year. Officials are working with stakeholders to develop the new activities that I will take forward. I hope to be able to announce the way forward soon after the start of next year.

Education is one area that will be looked at in wider projects under those broad headings.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she provide the House with greater details on recent developments in international trade negotiations? Perhaps she could tell us a wee bit more about what those developments are, how they will help the agriculture industry, if at all, and what the tariff liberalisations will mean for the industry.

Mrs O'Neill: The ongoing MERCOSUR discussions had been held up for quite some time. Recent developments with the MERCOSUR group will have a major impact on our trade and our access to those markets. Those developments have been stalled for quite some time, and I believe that they are expected to be stalled for considerably more time. Therefore, we will have to continue to watch that as it develops and deal with it as gets to a further stage.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to follow on from Jo-Anne Dobson's question about tackling rural poverty and social exclusion. I very much welcome efforts that are being made on that. However, will those efforts be restricted to border areas, or will they be rolled out throughout Northern Ireland, including the Strangford constituency?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member never misses an opportunity to stand up for his constituency. The Department is doing a lot of joint antipoverty and social exclusion work. Obviously, people who live in border areas are particularly isolated. The anti-poverty and social exclusion programme is my programme, and I will take it forward. It will cover all the Six Counties. We are co-operating with our counterparts to ensure that people who live in border regions are not left out. That is because a particular problem, which has been highlighted for years, is that those people face a lot more isolation.

Mr Irwin: Do her counterparts in the Irish Republic have concerns about the proposals for CAP reform that are similar to those that we have in Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. We share very similar views, particularly on the budget. Our priority in moving forward has to be to increase rural development funding, which is pillar 2 funding. That has been our consistent call to Europe, and DEFRA now agrees with us that that is the approach to take. The South of Ireland has had a better share of rural development funding over the past number of years. We

want to be in a similar position. We are, generally, in broad agreement with the South's position on CAP reform.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire arís.

I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to bring her back to the issue of brucellosis. Given that the South is now brucellosis free, and given how important that is for the agrifood industry and exports, can the Minister give an update on how close we are to eradicating brucellosis here?

Mrs O'Neill: As the Member will know, we are actually in a good position now compared with that in the past. The rate of brucellosis has dropped significantly. On 31 August 2011, confirmed herd incidences were just 0.039%. So, we are moving in the right direction. We now have the target in the Programme for Government. We will move towards a position in 2014 where eradication will be a real possibility. We hope to be in that position. That will help our industry with trade and all the other benefits that come with it, and it will bring savings to farmers in the vaccinations that they must carry out.

1.00 pm

Mr T Clarke: I also thank the Minister for her statement. In response to my colleague William Irwin, you said that the South is in a better position with axis 2 funding and the rural development programme. In paragraph 4 of your statement you said that you welcomed ongoing co-operation with the local action groups in relation to the programme. The South may be in a better position, but has your Department had any discussions with the Department there to discuss how it managed to better implement the programme?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We have worked with a limited amount of money in the rural development programme. We have always argued that we should have an increased share, and, as I said, that is the position that we will take in the CAP reform negotiations. There is a great deal of rural development co-operation through INTERREG funding. That is all based on partnership working, and, in my statement, I gave an example of a project that I was involved in launching.

We learn from each other in how the programmes have been implemented. The South argued for and got a bigger share of rural development funding. I want us to be in that position.

Mr Swann: I also thank the Minister for her statement. Minister, in your statement you said:

"The Council noted and welcomed ongoing cooperation on the rural development programme".

At that stage, did you discuss your intention to take £5 million from the Northern Ireland rural development programme for rural broadband? Did you also discuss, at that stage, the fact that you made the JCCs and LAGs aware of that decision only after you had made it, rather than consulting them beforehand?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Member obviously has not spoken to anyone from the JCCs, as they have broadly welcomed the proposals that I outlined. I am determined that we will not hand any money back to Europe at the end of the current rural development programme period, and I make no apologies for the steps that I am taking. They are the most feasible steps and

the most efficient way to ensure that we spend all of the European moneys that are available to us.

The meeting that I had last week with the LAGs and the JCCs was very positive. Those in the room welcomed the move, so perhaps the Member should speak to some of those who are involved in his area. I was concerned that the £5 million that was taken out of the programme would not be spent. The Member may not agree, but I think that rural broadband is a massive issue, and people in rural communities still do not have a decent broadband speed. I am determined to address that, and I will work with my colleagues in DETI to do so. Perhaps the Member should have some more discussions with those who are in his local JCC.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for her detailed statement. Will she provide an update on the delivery of her Department's anti-poverty and social exclusion framework?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I think that I have already picked up on that. It is safe to say that I will be able to launch the new programme early in the new year. We need to learn from what we did in the past and ensure that the new programme addresses the main needs of rural communities. It will deal with issues such as the rural childcare programmes that were taken forward by Michelle Gildernew in the previous term and were so successful. I hope to be able to announce some positive measures for rural communities early in the new year.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for her statement. With particular reference to paragraph 7 of the Minister's statement and considering last week's positive ruling by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in Britain on the issue of innocent mistakes and errors in single farm payments, has the Minister had an opportunity to undertake an assessment of the single farm payment applications in Northern Ireland that were refused due to errors, double-mapping or innocent mistakes? If so, what was the outcome?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Members are being creative in their questions. Those issues were not discussed at the NSMC meeting. We always look at the decisions that are taken, and there is a panel that reviews single farm payment decisions. The Department will ensure that last week's announcement is taken into account in any future review of single farm payment decisions.

Mr Buchanan: I listened carefully to the Minister's response about money being spent through the LAGs. Does she agree that it was her Department that, at the very start of the programme, held things back by not putting the proper programme in place and did not allow the programme to get off the ground? Does she also agree that her Department did not allow the LAGs to put the programmes in place to spend the money? So, rather than trying to cover up the Department's tracks, would she not agree that it was her Department's fault and that, had that money been spent, she would have had to look somewhere else for the £5 million that has been moved to upgrade broadband?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There is no doubt that there were teething problems in getting the project off the ground, and there is no doubt that the Department had a lot of red tape in place. There was a review, and things were improved. The reality is that the LAGs continue to underspend, but we need to be in a position where we can spend all that money. I hope that the

Member will agree that broadband provision is an issue in his area as well. That is a good way in which to spend the money. It is not wasted money; it is being taken from one project and put into another very worthy project.

Mr Elliott: Rather than being about something that is in the statement, my question is about something that is not in it. I am looking for an update. Large amounts of farmland have been flooded in the past few years in and around the Upper Lough Erne area in Fermanagh. There is obviously a significant cross-border element to that, because the hydropower station at Ballyshannon controls the water levels there. I wonder whether that has been resolved, because it has been the subject of much discussion over the past couple of years. Why was it not discussed at the North/South meeting?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Again, that is not mentioned in the statement. If the Member wants to contact me afterwards, I will get the matter looked into. It was not up for discussion at the meeting, but, if the Member sends me an e-mail, I will respond to that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should at all times ask questions that relate to the statement.

Assembly Business

Mr D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether the Speaker's Office would conduct some sort of analysis of the time that some Departments take to answer questions. I have tabled a number of questions in recent weeks, one on 28 October to ask for the timetable for the appointment of the Police Ombudsman and another to OFMDFM on 7 November about a legislative timetable for the Assembly. I still await a response to those questions. Those are just two examples.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Other Members have raised similar questions, and, no doubt, the Speaker will take note.

Ministerial Statement

Criminal Justice: Intergovernmental Agreement

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, I wish to make a statement regarding a meeting held under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on criminal justice co-operation, held in Antrim on Friday 25 November 2011. The meeting was attended by Alan Shatter TD, Minister for Justice and Equality and Minister for Defence, and I represented the Executive. This was the fourth formal ministerial meeting under the IGA since the devolution of justice on 12 April 2010. As I have said in previous statements to the House, I am committed to keeping the Assembly informed of meetings held under the auspices of the agreement on the same basis as for North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings.

The meeting on 25 November provided us both with an opportunity to review progress against a joint work programme that we agreed at our meeting on 8 June. I shared a copy of the work programme with Members as part of the oral statement following the June meeting. One of the actions in the work programme is the organisation of a joint public protection seminar. That seminar was held in Antrim on the same day as our meeting, but I will return to that in a few moments. Other agreed actions in the work programme include exploring the potential for fast-track probation reports to help to speed up justice; maximising opportunities for cooperation on forensic science; and sharing best practice on justice initiatives, as well as learning on how we can best support victims of crime.

We have reached the midpoint of the timeline for the work programme, which is due to be completed by next July. Following the next intergovernmental agreement meeting, I intend to give a more detailed report on progress made against the actions in the work programme.

Alan Shatter and I were also updated on the progress of the six project advisory groups. They focus on areas including public protection, registered offenders, youth justice, forensic science, support for victims of crime and social diversity. Each of the project advisory groups has continued to promote and support cooperation between officials across the broad spectrum of criminal justice agencies on both sides of the border. The public protection group, for example, has been working collaboratively towards the implementation of EU framework decisions on the transfer of prisoners and the transfer of probation supervision. The group has also led on the preparation of common statistics, which supports the comparison of key indicators across the two jurisdictions.

There is good co-operation between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána at an operational level on the management of sex offenders. An information-sharing agreement on sex offenders is already in place, and consideration is being given to applying the lessons from this exercise to other aspects of sensitive policing work. That progression of thinking is based on enhancing public protection and making sure that the border does not prevent the detection and management of offenders.

Ensuring that victims of crime receive the necessary support when they come into contact with the criminal justice system is a priority for both Alan Shatter and me. I advised

Mr Shatter about the work that is being done in Northern Ireland, including the Justice Committee's inquiry, the outcome of which will be of interest to the project advisory group that focuses on victims' issues and will inform the group's recent discussions about the proposed EU directive on establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

We were also updated on the work that is being taken forward on youth justice and how there is good sharing of learning on projects and initiatives across the two jurisdictions. Consideration is also being given to the potential for sharing information on respective inspections.

The co-operation between the two forensic science services continues with collaboration on sharing of expertise. That level of support is welcomed by the heads of the respective organisations, particularly in light of the changes to the provision of forensic science services in England and Wales. The Minister and I support the extent of the engagement, and we reinforced our commitment to enhancing mutual cooperation between the two services and, indeed, with the Scottish service.

Good progress is being made on exploring the scope for shared learning on social diversity issues that impact on the criminal justice systems, and discussions have also commenced on assessing the quality of interpretation services across the two jurisdictions. Mr Shatter and I also welcomed the conclusion of manuals on the investigation and prosecution of offences with a significant cross-border element. Those internal operational manuals will provide practical advice to the PSNI, an Garda Síochána, the Public Prosecution Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions. Conclusion of the work fulfils the commitment given in the published cross-border policing strategy, and it is an excellent example of co-operation that will provide clarity and consistency to officers and prosecutors who may be required to investigate and prosecute such cases.

I referred earlier to the public protection seminar held prior to my meeting with Alan Shatter, which had the theme of partnership working for public protection. It provided an opportunity for representatives of both probation services, alongside the other agencies, to discuss key public protection issues, including assessing risk regarding sex offenders; offender management; the strategy for the management of women offenders; and drug and alcohol misuse. I was pleased to be joined by Alan Shatter in opening the seminar. Significantly, the keynote address was given by the Lord Chief Justice. I know that it was a productive day for all involved.

I am pleased to report that there continues to be good progress in supporting and promoting North/South co-operation to make Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland a safer place. The meeting was a good opportunity to update Mr Shatter on the work that is being done in Northern Ireland on the development of a reducing offending strategy and community safety strategy. I was also updated on the development of the White Paper on crime that is being taken forward by the Department of Justice and Equality. It is clear that we have many similar challenges on both sides of the border.

The intergovernmental agreement provides a helpful framework for supporting North/South co-operation on

criminal justice matters, but we see the real benefits of co-operation when individuals in the criminal justice agencies develop good working relationships with their respective counterparts. Alan Shatter and I are committed to promoting and supporting that type of practical co-operation.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I note that the Minister said that the next statement will give more substantive details of the type of progress that we want to come out of these meetings. It is not clear what the tangible and real benefits of what is taking place are, apart from building up those relationships. I support and welcome the statement, but we need to see actual results and what they mean to the community.

I will pick up on the forensic science element. The Minister will know that the Committee visited that institution, and there is a clear problem in having drugs tested in a timely fashion to allow cases to proceed through the court system. Was there any discussion at the meeting of what benefits there could be in co-operating on that type of work so that the individuals who are scourging our communities can be taken through the court system and, hopefully, put away?

1.15 pm

Mr Ford: I thank the Chairman for his welcome. I take his point entirely about tangible benefits. As I said in the statement, a year's work programme, which was set in the summer, will be reported on after the next meeting in the summer of next year. That will be a suitable time to measure the tangible effects. He acknowledged that the issue of improved working relationships and sharing of expertise is always of benefit.

On the specific issue of the operation of the forensic science services North and South and, indeed, as I highlighted, in Scotland, there are real issues of capacity in every part of these islands. That has not been helped by the changes towards privatisation in England and Wales. Given the capacity limits that we all suffer, the key issue at this stage has been the sharing of expertise and professional assessments, rather than the opportunity to carry out work across the different agencies. However, the Chairman of the Committee will also know that the operation of the forensic science service is being closely followed up by the Department to ensure that we get the best possible efficiency and, in particular, the testing that he talks about done as efficiently, accurately and rapidly as possible.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the project advisory groups and the fact that the Committee for Justice will be particularly interested in the group on victims and witnesses because the Committee is conducting an inquiry on that matter. How often does that group meet, and what are its terms of reference and work programme?

Mr Ford: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for his welcome, but I fear that I will not be able to give him the precise information that he seeks. The project advisory groups meet as regularly as required. Generally, at least a couple of meetings of each of them are reported on when we meet, which is roughly every four or five months. It is a matter for the individual groups to handle their timings. I will get the precise details that the Member has requested and supply those to him.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement. He mentioned the sharing of information that has been put in place between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána in relation to sex offenders. Can he be more specific about the consideration that has been given to sharing information in other circumstances and what the other aspects of sensitive policing work might be?

Mr Ford: As I said, the issue of information sharing in other sensitive areas is being developed on the basis of the experience that we already have with regard to sex offenders. Obviously, there is a particular issue in the context of the border and the ease with which people can move across it. That requires careful management of those who, for example, are released on licence or are on the sex offender register. Those are the sorts of issues that are being followed up to see how we can work best between the two jurisdictions and ensure that we cover that properly. There are issues that apply to other people who are on licences, and that is the area of work that is currently being developed and on which I hope to report after the next meeting.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his very full report and welcome the continuing cooperation between the two jurisdictions and the two Ministers. Given the bizarre and, indeed, damaging decision to privatise the Forensic Science Service in Britain, is there not an opportunity for the forensic science laboratory in Northern Ireland, the one in the South and, indeed, the one in Scotland to get together not only to share expertise but to share work? In that way, a body of expertise and a capacity could be built that could be shared across the three jurisdictions.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for that helpful comment. He referred to privatisation in Britain, which, technically, means privatisation in England and Wales, as I think he would acknowledge. The issues, at this stage —

Mr A Maginness: I get confused between British and —

Mr Ford: Well, in terms of justice jurisdictions, I generally operate on the basis that there are three jurisdictions within the United Kingdom: one is called England and Wales, which covers the bits that are not called either Scotland or Northern Ireland.

I entirely agree with the Member that significant issues arise from the decisions taken in Whitehall around the privatisation of services for England and Wales. We are seeking to maximise the co-operation with Scotland and with Ireland to share expertise, and he will be aware of the investment proposals that we have for our laboratory at Carrickfergus.

The issue has to be how we can develop the expertise to share between the three public services in the three parts of these islands that are not called England and Wales, to ensure that we develop that expertise, share the opportunities and are able to see the laboratories assist each other at times of particular pressure. That would certainly be my ambition.

Mr Weir: Unlike the previous Member, I will try not to get my geography mixed up.

I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he referred to the co-operation between the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland on, for instance, the forensic

sciences. Work is clearly ongoing on the wider public protection issue. What further steps does he believe can be taken to ensure that there is a strengthening and deepening of the system of co-operation on public protection between all of the jurisdictions of the British Isles?

Mr Ford: Mr Weir raises the entirely reasonable point that, particularly in the context of now having four separate jurisdictions, we need to ensure that we maintain broadly similar — they will never be identical — arrangements for public protection in dealing with, for example, sex offenders and for ensuring that those who are on licence in one part of these islands are properly dealt with if they propose to move. That is why issues such as the transfer of probation supervision are important. That is why there are issues, which we highlighted, that show difficulties for Northern Ireland-domiciled UK citizens who would perhaps be eligible for early release in England and Wales but for whom the supervision cannot, at this stage of law, be carried through in Northern Ireland. We are seeking to improve those arrangements across all the jurisdictions, although my statement dwelt solely on the North/South matters.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. I know that he has referred to the management of sex offenders a number of times. Is the advisory group looking specifically at an all-Ireland register for sex offenders? That is the safest and best method by which to manage sex offenders.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the perspective and the constituency from which Mr Lynch comes when he asks such a question. However, the reality is that sex offenders can, effectively, move within Europe and certainly across the different regions of these islands. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of talking about a North/South sex offenders register; we have to ensure that the register in Northern Ireland can co-ordinate with those in the Republic, England and Wales and Scotland as and when required. We are seeking to promote that maximum co-operation to ensure full public protection in every part of these islands.

Mr Wells: The statement is interesting, but the elephant in the room — the glaring omission — is that there is no reference to a practice that costs the Northern Ireland economy £60 million, £80 million or £150 million, depending on whose figures you take: diesel smuggling and laundering. I am surprised that, after a long meeting and a seminar, the obvious issue, the one that requires much greater co-operation between the authorities in this part of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic — diesel laundering — is not in the statement. Was it mentioned, or is it on the agenda for the next meeting?

Mr Ford: The answer is that diesel laundering was not mentioned at that particular meeting. There are, of course, other areas where diesel laundering or fuel smuggling are being considered in different meeting formats; for example, the House of Commons Select Committee inquiry, to which I expect to give evidence in January in London. Other aspects of that are being carried through by the Organised Crime Task Force subgroups, where there is a strong cross-border element of involvement by Revenue and Customs alongside HMRC and the Garda Síochána alongside the PSNI. So, those issues are being addressed elsewhere. It is certainly not the case that the issue of dealing with fuel crime is being ignored.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the continuing commitment to cross-border working. I know that he half answered a question on this, but I want to press the Minister for more detail on future cooperation, which will hopefully be expanded, between the PSNI and Garda Síochána.

Mr Ford: I fear that responding to Mr Eastwood to welcome his enthusiasm and commitment but tell him that I am unable to give him exactly what he wants will become a long-running broken record. While I recognise the intent behind his question, as Minister, I need to be careful not to suggest that I should engage in too much political direction of what the PSNI and the Garda Síochána are doing. I will certainly ensure that whatever resource issues are raised are dealt with as expeditiously as possible in the Department in order to ensure that the co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána that we see daily is carried through to fight all kinds of crime right across the island. I believe that that is the case. I believe that, when Alan Shatter and I work together, the way in which we recognise that shows the full support for it. However, we need to ensure that the operational decisions rest with the Chief Constable and the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána.

Mr Allister: The Minister has been very busy in his engagement with the Republic's Department of Justice. He has had four formal meetings with the Minister; he has an agreed work programme, which is ongoing; and he has six joint project advisory groups to assist with all that. How many meetings has the Minister had with the Justice Secretary in London, the Home Secretary in London or any Justice Minister of the nation of which we are a part? How many work programmes has he ongoing in that regard? How many joint project advisory groups has he working on those issues?

In concert with Mr Wells, I express surprise about the diesel issue, but I also ask the Minister whether terrorism and its cross-border threat was discussed —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member knows well that he should put one question.

Mr Ford: Being a generous soul, I shall endeavour to answer a few of Mr Allister's questions, though I did lose count of them.

The Member needs to recognise the reality that there is a specific issue of the intergovernmental agreement, which was established prior to the devolution of justice powers, through which officials in the Northern Ireland Office met officials in the Department of Justice and Equality in Dublin on specific matters of criminal justice co-operation. That is what I am committed to carrying through, and the project groups that the Member highlighted exist. If the Member wants an answer to the specific question about meetings that I have had with those from the UK —

Mr Wells: The rest of the UK.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Minister will resume his seat. I ask Members not to shout across the Chamber, please. Continue.

Mr Ford: On the specific issue of meetings that I have had with Ministers from the other two jurisdictions within the UK, I have had one formal meeting with Mr Kenneth Clarke, one formal meeting with Mrs Theresa May, three formal meetings — I think — with Mr Kenny MacAskill, who is the Minister

in Scotland, and more meetings with junior Ministers in the Justice Department and the Home Office than I can currently remember.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his statement, particularly the part about the enhanced co-operation between an Garda Síochána and the PSNI on managing sex offenders across the border. Has that work and type of co-operation extended to dealing with those involved in human trafficking?

Mr Ford: I appreciate my colleague's question. Of course, the management of sex offenders is not just for the police services North and South but for the probation services North and South. It formed a large part of the public protection conference that happened on the same day.

It is also very clear that, North and South, we recognise the serious issue of human trafficking and that sex offenders are also those who cause hurt and damage to trafficked people — predominantly women but also children and men.

1.30 pm

There has certainly been significant co-operation on the issue. For example, last year, we ran the Blue Blindfold campaign to ask people to open their eyes to the issue of human trafficking. Unfortunately, for budgetary reasons, the campaign was not as strong in the Republic as we would have hoped. However, the issue has featured in discussions with Alan Shatter, and I hope that there will be the opportunity in the coming months to develop further cooperation against traffickers in conjunction with the authorities in Dublin, Edinburgh and London.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he spoke of the management of sex offenders and enhancing public protection. On the issue of sex offences, especially those committed against children, was there any discussion on the possible introduction of Sarah's law? If not, does the Minister not think that it warrants discussion? Furthermore, will he look favourably on a Sarah's law for Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: The simple answer is that there was no such discussion. I would not expect a member of the DUP to wish me to discuss future legislative change in Northern Ireland with a representative of the Irish Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker: On that note, we will conclude questions to the Minister of Justice.

Private Members' Business

Cancer Drugs Fund

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

Mr Ross: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give consideration to the creation of a cancer drugs fund.

I thank the Business Committee for allowing the motion to be debated this afternoon. The wording of the motion is deliberate in that it asks for consideration to be given to the creation of a cancer fund for Northern Ireland. I think that that allows the Minister the degree of flexibility that is required, and it allows Members to come up with their own modifications and proposals for a cancer drugs fund. It recognises that there would need to be full consultation with the health sector before this proposal could be brought any further forward. It also recognises that there are some criticisms of the cancer drugs fund that operates in England and that we need to come up with ideas on how we would pay for such a fund. It is important that when Members put forward proposals in motions, they come up with ways to pay for them; not to do so is irresponsible. I hope to address both issues in my contribution.

The Health Minister has previously highlighted the significant improvements in survival outcomes for cancer patients in recent years. That has been helped by the promotion of healthier lifestyles, earlier diagnoses and patients becoming more involved in the decision-making process about care. However, it is also a fact that a report by Sir Mike Richards, the national cancer director, found that the UK's uptake of new drugs falls behind that of other European countries, despite the fact that in the United Kingdom, and in Northern Ireland in particular, we have a strong record in cancer research and participation in clinical trials. That means that although we are strong in those areas, NHS patients are not necessarily benefiting. The report helped to for international patients and treatments for UK patients, and why UK patients were not able to access innovative and new cancer drugs. That, in turn, led to the establishment of the £50 million fund that was announced in July 2010.

The rapid adoption of new drugs will not only benefit patients but will, arguably, be important in promoting research and development by the life sciences industry. Cancer Research UK has highlighted its concern at the fact that the United Kingdom lags behind other European countries in access to cancer drugs and has stated that a system of reimbursement, such as a cancer fund:

“rewards innovation and makes cancer treatments available to patients in the UK”.

It is also important to recognise that in our draft Programme for Government, there is a commitment to enhance access to life-enhancing drugs for conditions such as cancer.

The establishment of a Northern Ireland cancer drugs fund could, I believe, help to achieve that goal, particularly given that there have been huge advancements in treatments, as anyone who has visited the cancer centre in Belfast will have seen. Those advances are around personalised medicines that more effectively target subgroups of patients. However, many of those drugs are much more expensive and can be much more difficult to get access to.

While visiting the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology last month with the Employment and Learning Committee — the Chairperson of the Health Committee was there as well — I had the opportunity to speak to Professor Joe O'Sullivan. He highlighted the delay that cancer patients in Northern Ireland face in accessing some of the innovative new drugs that are available. He also pointed out that his colleagues in England had access to the cancer drugs fund, and that a similar scheme in Northern Ireland would be hugely beneficial for cancer patients here.

The fund is a fairly simple thing. It is money set aside by government to pay for cancer drugs that have not yet been approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), and are, therefore, not yet available through the NHS. That is either because they have not been assessed yet or because NICE does not feel that they would be cost-effective.

The cancer drugs fund started at the beginning of April this year and is, in essence, the extension of the £50 million fund that I spoke about, which was launched in July last year. That was estimated to help some 2,000 patients to get access to life-extending drugs.

The fund will be in place until 2014, when the national Government plan to introduce a new way of setting prices for cancer drugs in an effort to make more drugs routinely available in the National Health Service. The fund in England is worth some £200 million annually, but it is estimated that a similar fund for Northern Ireland would cost around £3 million annually. That figure was given to me by cancer experts in the centre in Belfast.

The way that the fund works is that doctors can apply to the fund to get certain drugs for their patients, examples of which are some prostate cancer drugs that can add three to four months to a patient's life and make their final months much more comfortable. It was explained to me that those drugs are not available at present to cancer patients in Northern Ireland because NICE is not due to assess them until spring. After approval, it could be up to a further six months before they would be available in Northern Ireland. Hopefully, recent changes to the system will dramatically reduce that delay, but it remains the case that in the absence of a drugs fund, patients in Northern Ireland cannot have the same level of access to life-enhancing drugs as patients in England.

In fact, the Rarer Cancers Foundation found that cancer patients in Northern Ireland are denied access to, it claims, 29 life-extending treatments available to patients in England. Some of those have been approved by NICE but not yet locally. Others are not available on the NHS but are available to patients through the cancer drugs fund in England. Therefore, patients in England are able to access drugs that patients in Northern Ireland cannot. A local cancer drugs fund could correct that anomaly and allow local

cancer patients to get access to innovative new drugs that could allow them valuable extra time with their loved ones.

The way that the fund would work would also put clinicians and cancer specialists at the very heart of decision-making. It would allow drug treatments for patients who, until that point, had been denied access to a particular drug recommended by their oncologist because NICE did not deem it to be cost-effective or had not assessed the drug at that time.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, there are some criticisms of the cancer drugs fund, and it is important that Members address those issues during the debate. When the Scottish Parliament debated the issue, MSPs were concerned that a cancer drugs fund would give preference to cancer over all other illnesses. That is an unusual argument, particularly for members of the SNP in Scotland to make, given that all legislatures across the world have to take decisions on funding one area rather than another, perhaps building one road rather than another or keeping one school open and closing another. Those are the natural consequences of taking decisions in government.

My belief is that a cancer drugs fund would address the fact that patients in Northern Ireland do not have the same level of access to life-enhancing drugs as their counterparts elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Studies have highlighted that we are not accessing innovative new drugs quickly enough.

A second criticism of the fund in the English press was that money for it was being taken from elsewhere in the health budget and was not in fact new money. I fully recognise that finances are tight in every Department, perhaps nowhere more so than in the Department of Health. I would, therefore, not propose that any money be taken from elsewhere in the Minister's budget to fund the scheme. If Members support the principle of establishing a drugs fund for Northern Ireland, we must be open to looking at ways in which it could be funded. Again, the motion is not prescriptive on how that could be achieved, and that allows Members to put forward their own ideas. One area that could clearly be looked at is the Minister's reintroduction of a modest fee for prescriptions for those who could afford to pay a few pounds once or twice a year. The most vulnerable groups in our society, such as senior citizens and those with long-term illnesses, would be exempted, of course. However, I do not think that it would cause a lot of concern to most people who are fortunate enough to be relatively healthy to have a modest charge for prescriptions to pay for this fund. We have to give thought to that kind of issue. It is important that we have a mature debate. It is not good enough to just support a motion without coming forward with ideas on how we could meet its financial implications.

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, and I commend him on the motion. Does the Member agree that when we look at how money could be secured for this type of fund, we should always remember that these are individual lives and life-saving drugs? I spoke very recently to a Lagan Valley constituent who is on his fourth set of life-saving cancer drugs. He commended the health service for the work that is done currently, because his life has been extended. He has children and grandchildren. Whatever can be done to help such individuals should be done. That should be at the forefront of all our minds when we consider this issue.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for that contribution. It is very important to remember that access to these types of drugs, which is denied currently, could greatly improve the quality of life of many people and, perhaps, give them extra months with those whom they care about most.

In conclusion, establishing a cancer drugs fund for Northern Ireland is not something that we have to do but that we could choose to do, with relatively little financial pain. It could speed up access to innovative new drugs for cancer patients and allow patients access to life-enhancing drugs that are denied to them currently. I look forward to Members' contributions. I ask them to support the motion to allow consideration to be given to the establishment of a Northern Ireland cancer drugs fund.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for proposing the motion. It is a very important motion on a subject that we should be talking about. I believe that it will be supported across the House, because we can all talk about constituents with life-limiting conditions for whom access to drugs would have given them more time with their loved ones.

I am normally in the Chamber shouting about inequalities west of the Bann. This time, we are talking about inequalities west of the Irish Sea. We should all be angry and very disappointed about the fact that the British Government set up a fund concerned with cancer drugs for people in England only. We should raise our voices unanimously to tell the British Government that they are sending a very clear message to cancer sufferers in the North of Ireland who do not have access to the same amount of drugs. We all know that spend on cancer drugs in Britain is significantly less than across the rest of Europe.

I remember a scene from 'The Commitments' in which the characters said that they were right at the bottom of the pile. When I was getting ready for today's debate, I thought that that is us: we are right at the bottom of the pile. If you get cancer in the North of Ireland, it is your tough luck. The Department of Health and the Minister do not have access to the same resources to buy those drugs as in England.

It is a very personal issue for me, as it probably is for a lot of us. Many of us have dealt with constituents who came to us looking for access to particular drugs that their oncologist or consultant said would help them. One of my Fermanagh constituents was given four to six weeks to live two years ago. He was put on a drug treatment programme, and two years later, he is enjoying life and a quality of life that he would certainly not have had without those drugs. This summer, I got a phone call from another constituent who had a very short time left. She had two small children and hoped that she would have enough time to see her eldest child's first day at school. Thankfully, she did. She continues to battle cancer daily but the time that she has had to spend with her two children has been extremely precious. None of us should have the right to take that away from anyone.

1.45 pm

I accept our limitations from a financial point of view. I welcome the fact that there is a commitment in the Programme for Government to enhance access to life-enhancing drugs for conditions such as cancer and the announcement that £5 million of the funding identified for

the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the October monitoring round was to be used to purchase crucial drugs and treatments.

That is good news for hundreds of people, but we would like good news for thousands of people. We know that statistics for the chances that we will get cancer are stark: one in three of us will get cancer, and one in two of us will die from it — or one in four and one in three. The figures are that stark. Many of us will contract cancer; some of us will survive, but many of us will die as a result of it.

The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety has been very assertive in looking for preventative strategies that help to do away with later, more invasive and costly interventions. We applauded the work that we saw, for example, in Altnagelvin Area Hospital during a presentation by the Western Trust on bowel cancer and how early intervention can help to avoid more difficult interventions at a later date. We welcome that and would like to see more of it but we know that it takes time and money.

I am lucky to be a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, which, earlier this year, visited Queen's University's Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology. I saw some of the machinery used to detect and treat cancer — and to treat it more specifically by directly targeting the cancerous cells as opposed to killing lots of cells around them. Technology is coming on well. We have to work across the island, across Europe and globally. The Minister went to the United States earlier this year and had discussions with people involved in cancer treatment there. So, I think that we should all sing from the same hymn sheet.

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

Ms Gildernew: We should insist that equality is directed towards the people of the North and that our constituents have the same access to life-saving treatment as everyone else.

Mr McCallister: I commend the Member who moved the motion, both on the motion and the way that he produced the arguments. It is a very sensible and productive way of hearing what Members will contribute to the debate. He quite rightly pointed out that it is very easy to bring motions to the Chamber and to say that we should do more on this or that but not know how this or that will be paid for or funded.

The motion is of great interest to all Members. Very few families will not have been touched by cancer at some point. That is one reason why it is, and will continue to be, such an emotive issue to debate.

I would like to tease out some of the proposer's comments. A cancer drugs fund could have many advantages. The Member put the cost at £3 million, but the research pack suggests that it might be closer to £5 million or £6 million. There are issues around exactly where the money would come from, how we would use it, who would decide how it would be spent, and which patients would get the treatment.

The Member quite rightly mentioned the debate in the Scottish Parliament, which comes back to what the Committee Chairperson said. She was very critical of the British Government for not extending the policy to Northern Ireland. I remind her that health is a devolved matter.

Therefore, it is up to the Minister and the Assembly to decide whether to consider the policy. It is up to us to have the debate and to say that here are some of the things that we might want to learn from the English experience; here are some of the changes that we might want to take on board if we go down this road, and that this is the way that the system would work. Or, indeed, we might say no to something because it might lead to more of a postcode lottery or to more inequalities. Most of us will be supportive of the idea that this is worth looking into.

I take the point in the Scottish debate about whether we end up pitting one condition against another. Some conditions already have waiting lists, and colleagues will be aware of the debate and the work that the Minister has done on waiting lists for arthritis drugs. Those will and should be of concern to Members and how any new system on cancer drugs that have not been approved by NICE would operate and whether you end up draining resources away from different areas and pitting one condition against another. As the proposer rightly said, that has to be addressed to create something that could be very positive.

Mr Ross: I am sure that the Member will accept that I acknowledged that we would not be taking money away from anywhere else in the system. That is why I proposed that we look at modest prescription charges. Other Members might disagree, and it might not be the direction that we go. However, if we want to ensure that we do not take money from other areas of the Budget, it is important that we look at ways in which we can generate income to fund such a scheme.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for that intervention. If it is decided that we go for that, it would be a very positive step as you would not have that competition for resources. That would not be helpful. Given Mr Ross's comments, I do not think that he would want us to go down that road either. Therefore, there are positives.

I was slightly dismayed by the Chairperson of the Health Committee being very negative about the processes and the work that has been done to improve outcomes for cancer patients in Northern Ireland over the past number of years. We have made huge strides with the work of the cancer centre, specialising at Belfast City Hospital and with research and linkages between the hospital and clinicians and Queen's University. The Health Committee visited there on several occasions in the previous mandate, as did the Committee for Employment and Learning. Therefore, much good work is being carried out on cancer, but much still needs to be done. A cancer drugs fund could play an important role in promoting better outcomes and giving access to life-prolonging drugs and treatments that could make a huge impact on people's lives.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the motion and echo the sentiments of previous Members to speak. The motion will concentrate minds on an important and urgent matter. As Mr McCallister said, I doubt that there is anyone in the Chamber who has not been touched by cancer and its effects or who has not lost someone close who died after being diagnosed with the disease.

Sadly, the numbers of diagnoses and deaths continue to rise, and we must welcome successful ongoing work on new and innovative treatments. However, the real quandary is

how we make those treatments and drugs accessible to the people of Northern Ireland.

It is paramount that we identify and establish the resource to allow cancer sufferers here to avail themselves of life-saving and improving drugs. We have a moral obligation to ease the pain and to improve the lives of those who are suffering, but before looking at new drugs, we must look at why existing drugs are being denied to people with cancer.

According to an Ulster Cancer Foundation report, cancer patients here are missing out on life-prolonging medicines that have been approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. That has been attributed to a shortfall in funding and to the fact that, as a result of the shortfall, we have no ability to implement NICE guidance. That is not acceptable.

When we talk figures, we must look at the wider picture. A proactive and preventative health strategy is the best way to generate funding for front line care. That point is certainly not lost on the Minister.

A report published last week cited the fact that 100,000 cases of cancer are preventable. We must do all that we can to ensure such prevention by supporting community pharmacies, GPs and community groups to deliver smoking cessation programmes, healthy eating programmes and early detection schemes. Such schemes will become even more necessary as the cost of treating cancer increases. A report published this morning suggests that the cost of treating cancer will increase by 60% by 2021.

The motion calls on the Minister to consider the creation of a cancer drugs fund, which would, or should, enable cancer patients here to avail themselves of new drugs and to get as much treatment as possible. As has been said, patients in England are able to access drugs that are unavailable to patients here. Another report, as cited by Mr Ross, suggests that England lags behind Europe, and now we are lagging behind England. Are we letting down our cancer sufferers and their families if we deny them the same opportunities? They cannot afford to wait for life-enhancing drugs; they are very important.

Work must also be done as a matter of urgency to address delays in access to cancer medicines. The idea of doctors being forced to fill out individual funding requests each time they want to prescribe a new cancer medicine for a patient is ridiculous, and, sadly, permission is often granted too late.

We welcome the positive steps taken thus far by Minister Poots and the Executive in the battle against cancer. The allocation of £5 million earlier this year to address the problem of accessibility was great news. It will be nice to see it used, to see it used, nice. There must be engagement with the Department and cancer groups to ensure better retention of data and a sensible allocation of that fund. The Minister must also endeavour to secure a decent settlement over value-based pricing and to engage fully in that debate to ensure that the needs of patients are met.

There is also a huge role for pharmaceutical companies. Consideration of the creation of a cancer drugs fund is the least that we can do for our patients, and establishing one is what we must do. We have a duty to explore all avenues to better patient recovery and treatment. The Minister deserves credit for his continued prioritisation of cancer

treatments, and he will have our support in his attempts to jump the inevitable economic hurdles that he will face as he does so. We are happy to work with others in trying to identify from where those resources might come.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Durkan: As a closing point, I call for support for other innovative ways to aid cancer patients, such as the promotion of bone marrow donations.

Mr McCarthy: I thank colleagues Alastair Ross and Peter Weir for tabling this important motion. The Alliance Party fully supports every effort that is made, as, I am sure, will all Members. We will support those efforts to help to cure, to prevent pain or to prolong the lives of cancer sufferers, regardless of whether they come through government, health trusts or universities.

The motion asks our Health Minister to consider the creation of a cancer drugs fund. We will support that proposal. Like every Member here today, Alliance Party Members have been affected by the ravages of this disease. Undoubtedly, we wish to see the day when the motto for Cancer Research UK, "Together We Will Beat Cancer", comes true. That day cannot come quickly enough for all of us.

I pay tribute to all cancer organisations for the excellent work that they have done, and continue to do, in so many ways to help people and their families who are affected by cancer. I attended the opening of a second Cancer Research shop, ReNew, in the small town of Portaferry in my locality.

That is a sign that the local volunteers and customers who support those shops are working hard to raise funds for cancer research. That is truly magnificent work, and it is repeated over and over again throughout Northern Ireland to the benefit of cancer victims.

2.00 pm

From April 2011, a cancer drugs fund of £200 million a year has been set up in England. Although it may have its critics, the fund means that cancer patients are getting access to drugs to help with their conditions. Surely, that has to be welcomed. To date, no such fund has been set up in Northern Ireland. Once again, our patients are being denied equality with citizens across the water.

I remind Members of a very significant speech made by Health Minister Poots to the annual general meeting of the Ulster Cancer Foundation recently, when he said that cancer was a priority for us all and that he was determined to do all in his power to improve outcomes for cancer patients. We welcome those comments and support the Minister in his endeavours. He has put significant emphasis on prevention, better lifestyles and early detection. Of course, he congratulated the Ulster Cancer Foundation on its work. Now that the foundation, like us today, is calling for a cancer drugs fund to be set up in Northern Ireland, let us hope that the Minister's response will be positive.

Cancer Research UK is placing importance on the new value-based pricing, which will come about shortly. The system will allow the price of drugs to be based on a range of factors, including access value. There is concern about how that will operate here, and it is important that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety works with

colleagues in Britain to ensure that the new scheme meets the needs of patients in Northern Ireland. The proposer of the motion mentioned the funding of that project and, of course, that is at the forefront of all our concerns. However, there is an old saying, "Where there's a will, there's a way". In most cases, money can be found.

The Alliance Party welcomes the motion. We hope that the Minister will take on board the comments made by Members and give the proposal his very detailed and thorough consideration.

Mr Wells: This is a very timely motion. All of us have had the experience of a close friend or relative who has received the worrying and dreadful diagnosis of cancer. However, it must be emphasised that outcomes in Northern Ireland have improved dramatically over the past 30 years. When I was young — a very long time ago — when a child was diagnosed with leukaemia, sadly, it was almost certainly a death sentence. Now, more than 80% of leukaemia sufferers are alive after five years. There has been a similar dramatic reduction in mortality in cases of breast cancer and prostate cancer. Unfortunately, however, there are still areas, such as lung cancer, where the prognosis is much poorer.

Let us be clear: although we are, quite rightly, concentrating on treatments today, the best and most cost-effective way of reducing cancer in Northern Ireland is lifestyle, and that is why I welcome the comments made by Mark Durkan on the need to improve people's health choices in Northern Ireland to ensure that they do not get cancer. Last year, we lost 2,300 people due to the effects of smoking. The vast majority of them died from lung cancer. Lung cancer results in a very agonising, painful, prolonged death. Recently, I witnessed two people whom I know quite well die from lung cancer. It was ghastly. In both cases, they were heavy smokers.

Our Committee visited the City Hospital's cancer unit 18 months ago and saw the outstanding work being undertaken by Paddy Johnston and his colleagues. He showed us two jars of formaldehyde, which contained the lungs of people who had died from lung cancer and who were heavy smokers. What did two of our Committee members do at the tea break? They went out for a smoke. I think that that indicates the problem that we have. We have to ensure that we educate our public so that they take the lifestyle choices that are necessary to avoid cancer.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Sadly, of course, we know from last week's report that even by doing that, there will still be people who will contract cancer. Therefore, it is important that we in Northern Ireland have exactly the same access to drug treatments as those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I absolutely sympathise and empathise with what he is saying. Last April, I lost my father to lung cancer in circumstances such as those that he just described. The Member's giving way gives me the opportunity to raise the predicament of a constituent of mine Mrs Carol Parkinson, about whom I have written to the Minister. She has visited my office. Indeed, I attended a fundraiser on her behalf last night. In December last year, she was re-diagnosed with breast cancer after eight years' treatment. She visited the hospital, and the trust told her that the oncologist recommended specific treatment that can be provided only

in exceptional circumstances. In short, Carol has to find £1,300 a month for the treatment because she is in a dispute with the trust. That is a legal matter that I will not pursue. However, the community is backing her completely in her campaign. Does the Member agree that in this day and age, that is simply not acceptable? What more exceptional circumstances can there be for an individual to be prescribed life-prolonging drugs or drugs that will mean that a lady such as her will have life going forward?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Wells: Thank you. I certainly agree with the Member. I know that he was very keen to raise that issue on behalf of his constituent.

We are indebted to the Ulster Cancer Foundation, which provided Members with a very interesting briefing note. It revealed that 70% of the specialists who work in that field in Northern Ireland believe that insufficient funding is available for cancer treatments. They backed the motion, as it calls for a specific cancer fund to be set up. Dr Martin Eatock, who is a consultant at the Belfast City Hospital, said:

"There is already a clear gap between Northern Ireland and England in the timeliness of routine access to NICE approved drugs. The introduction of the Cancer Drugs Fund in England has meant that Northern Ireland lags further behind. Our cancer patients are, in some cases, unable to access treatments with proven clinical benefits available to other parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland."

I know that the Minister is very interested in this issue. Many Members will note that in the October monitoring round, he successfully bid for an extra £5 million for a mixture of anti-tumour necrosis factor — anti-TNF — and improved cancer treatments. Clearly, we are knocking on an open door and there is considerable support for this matter.

However, we still have the problem of the NICE delays. In Northern Ireland, we have to wait many months after a cancer drug has been approved in the rest of the United Kingdom before it is implemented here. We need to look at that. If I am a cancer sufferer in Ballymena, why should I be treated less favourably than if I lived in Basingstoke? We are all part of the United Kingdom and we all pay the same taxes, so we should surely be entitled to the same drug treatment.

I think that it was Mr Ross who had the idea that some administration charge for prescriptions might be one way of releasing money for much-needed drug treatments. I suspect that if the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland knew that the money was being hypothecated for the specific purchase of drug treatments, they would not be too worried about paying a 50p or £1 administration charge for a prescription. Perhaps that is one way of releasing the money that is required. Although there may not be a drugs fund as such in Northern Ireland —

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

Mr Wells: — there is nothing to stop us from funding it from our own resources.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also support the motion, and I thank the Member for bringing it to the House.

A cancer drugs fund that is similar to what has been set up in England should be considered here for a number of reasons. If a cancer drugs fund were in place here, it would make it a lot easier for patients to have access to the treatment that they greatly need for their specialist types of cancer. A cancer drugs fund should be effective and accessible to all those who are in great need of it. Access to such funds should be based on the clinical effectiveness and delivery of measurable outcomes such as overall survival rates and enhanced quality of life.

Entitlement to access should not be based on a postcode lottery in which a commissioner or an individual from a particular trust decides whether a patient can get funding for specialist drugs. That should not be a bone of contention. As stated in the research, oncologists and doctors should be the lead professionals when it comes to making applications for funding, as they know best for their patients and are the experts. My colleague Michelle Gildernew mentioned the draft Programme for Government and its commitment to ensure access to better innovative cancer drugs. We welcome that commitment because it will go some way towards addressing the gap and improving the lives of those with cancer. However, more money needs to be invested in more effective treatments.

We now have access to data from all-Ireland research on cancer, which was released last week. The data identified which types of cancers are more prevalent than others and in which areas across the island of Ireland. That research informs us of the different cancer trends. It also informs researchers of the specialist treatments that will be needed in future. Earlier, colleagues spoke about the use of specialist cancer drugs and about the fact that the amount spent on them here is very low in comparison with other European countries. As Mark Durkan stated earlier, patients are not even able to access basic cancer treatments.

I want to share a story about a young man in my hometown of Strabane, where there is a high incidence of cancers, particularly among the young. The 31-year-old man, whom I know very well, was recently diagnosed with a rare form of cancer and because of the aggressive nature of his illness, he has been given less than a year to live. However, his family and friends are refusing to give up hope and have already begun to look at specialist treatments in places such as Mexico, Rome and America. Normal treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy are no good for treating his cancer, so they have to look elsewhere. He said that he is well aware that there are alternative innovative drugs that have not yet been approved. However, those drugs would help him. He has told us that there is money to be made in the traditional medicines that treat cancers but, unfortunately, those medicines will not help him. Like other families, his family have to cope not only with the fact that their son or brother might die soon, but with doing their own research and funding initiatives to keep him alive.

People living with cancer should not be denied the right to proper advanced medical treatments. They should have a better quality of life. Minister, you stated previously that cancer services will remain a top priority as you introduce the changes necessary for the delivery of health services, and we welcome that.

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

Ms Boyle: You also said that cancer patients here should have the best treatment in comparison with anywhere else. I would like the Minister to give full consideration to creating a cancer drugs fund that will enable cancer patients to access the drugs that their oncologists recommend.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Members who tabled the motion. As others said, in the course of our lives, all of us will be affected by cancer, either directly or indirectly. Cancer is a vicious, horrible disease that uncontrollably invades the body. It is cruel and brutal in its attack and, for many of us, it leads to an early death.

2.15 pm

Although much has been done by the Minister in this mandate to improve cancer services, it is still inadequate. As a result, many needless deaths still occur. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency states that out of the 14,500 deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2010, over half were caused by the three main diseases, of which cancer was the highest at 4,000 deaths.

The most important factors in increasing cancer survival rates are prevention and early diagnosis. In many cases, no drugs or treatment will halt the spread of that disease and, ultimately, an untimely death. As has been stated, there are many contributing factors to cancer, including lifestyle. However, many are genetically disposed to that cruel disease. That is why early diagnosis is of paramount importance to the management and the improved success of survival rates of cancer.

We have various screening programmes, including screening for cervical, bowel and breast cancer. We have 120,000 women screened every year in Northern Ireland for cervical cancer, with an average of 80 receiving a cancer diagnosis. What is most concerning about that figure, however, is that over half those women who are diagnosed had never had a cervical smear.

Any one of us who has suffered from cancer or has watched a loved one deteriorate knows the importance of access to suitable treatments, including drugs that are not routinely available. Those drugs can make a massive difference to cancer sufferers and their families, put the patient at the centre and give clinicians and patients greater control over the management of that disease, providing better outcomes. It is concerning that we in Northern Ireland are at an unfair disadvantage. I thank the proposer of the motion for asking the Minister to give consideration to a cancer drugs fund, and I look forward to his response.

I agree with what was said about equality of opportunity for all people in Northern Ireland to receive the appropriate drugs to prolong life. I believe strongly that access to those appropriate drugs, along with prevention and early diagnosis, can ensure a reduction in cancer deaths in Northern Ireland. I support the motion.

Mr Gardiner: I have no difficulty in supporting the motion. In fact, I fully support it because I share with other Members the experience of what cancer is like for loved ones. I lost my mother due to cancer and my two sisters at the ages of

50 and 53. So I welcome the motion and fully support it. I also thank the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for their announcement on 8 December about the £100 payment under the social protection fund for those who are undergoing cancer treatment.

Before the ministerial announcement on 22 September this year, with no equivalent of England's cancer drugs fund, Northern Ireland had no clear system in place to access treatment that has not been recommended by NICE on the grounds of cost-effectiveness. Recent research by the Rarer Cancers Foundation found that cancer patients in Northern Ireland are denied access to 29 life-extending treatments that are available in England. That is clearly an unacceptable situation that needs to be addressed on the grounds of equality within the United Kingdom, let alone on the grounds of compassion.

The Rarer Cancers Foundation has shown that providing additional funding to the equivalent level of the cancer drugs fund would cost just £5.8 million a year and benefit an estimated 279 patients in the Province. The Minister, in a difficult budgetary situation, is trying to help, and I welcome that.

A new revised process to speed up the applications of NICE-approved drugs was introduced from 28 September this year. At the time, the Minister said that he was open to explore other options to increase the resources available to fund access to specialist medicines. The motion will, I believe, make it clear that it is the will of the Assembly that the Minister acts on this matter. The Minister said that he puts patients rather than structures first, and I fully support him in that. I call on him to find the relatively modest sum of £5.8 million a year, which is needed to make this happen. That represents just 0.13% of his annual budget.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Members who tabled the motion. As someone who has personal experience of losing a loved one to cancer almost 23 years ago, I fully support the premise of this motion. Unfortunately, at that time, life-enhancing and life-prolonging drugs were not available but if they had been, obviously, we would have fought long and hard to ensure that they were made available.

The British Government have put £200 million a year into the cancer drugs fund so that patients will get better access to the drugs that their doctors have recommended for them. The drugs fund was developed using the views of healthcare professionals, patients, carers and the public. Alistair Ross mentioned that if such a fund is set up here, consultation will be essential. In England, in the development of the fund, healthcare professionals were used in the consultation process.

In Britain, usage of new cancer drugs is relatively low in comparison with the international average. In setting up the fund, it was stated:

"We will create a Cancer Drugs Fund to enable patients to access the cancer drugs their doctors think will help them."

The guidance also stated:

"The fund is intended to pay for the purchase of medicines...Panels may reasonably decide not to fund

drugs where there has been no NICE appraisal...Criteria for access to the fund should be based primarily on evidence of clinical effectiveness and anticipated delivery of measurable outcomes such as improved overall survival".

As has been stated, the Minister told delegates at the Ulster Cancer Foundation AGM that he was determined to do all in his power to improve outcomes for cancer patients. He said:

"I want cancer patient outcomes here to be amongst the best in the UK and Europe".

However, recent research by the Rarer Cancer Foundations found that patients in the North are denied access to 29 life-extending treatments that are available in England. As there is no cancer drugs fund, there is no clear mechanism for accessing treatments that have not been recommended by NICE on the grounds of cost-effectiveness. Patients here should get equal access to drugs that are proven to be effective. As someone who sits on the Social Development Committee and is constantly being bombarded with talk about the need for parity and its effects, it seems that when we get to health, parity is not necessarily considered. As another Member stated, if people in England have access to these life-enhancing and life-prolonging drugs, so should people here.

Belfast is the home of one of the cancer research centres that help to set the pace for national and international progress in research into bowel, oesophageal and breast cancers. The Programme for Government states that there will be enhanced access to life-enhancing drugs for conditions such as cancer, and £5 million in the October monitoring round was to be used for purchasing crucial drugs and treatment. Therefore, I ask the Minister to consider ways of finding the money to set up a drugs fund because, as has been mentioned, we are talking about people's lives.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak about this motion. Unfortunately, cancer is an issue that affects many in this House in some way or another. I am sure that we all have a close relative or friend who has had their life changed as a result of cancer. Given its seriousness, this Assembly should continue to take cancer seriously. The Minister has made it a priority to get the best outcomes for cancer sufferers and to develop work on cancer prevention and early intervention.

There has been good work done recently, including the commitment in the recent draft Programme for Government to enhance access to life-enhancing drugs for conditions, including cancer. Setting up a drugs fund is an option worth considering. The creation of such a fund could help to improve and to extend the lives of those suffering from this terrible disease. Anything that could be done to achieve that should be looked at and considered seriously.

We can also learn from developments in England, where a cancer drugs fund has been established. We need to listen to groups, organisations, professionals and patients who are at the front line in the fight against cancer. There is clear evidence that the establishment of the fund in England has directly benefited over 7,500 patients with rare forms of cancer by enabling them to access drugs that their doctors believe would benefit them. Many people would agree that the creation of a cancer drugs fund has resulted in patients

accessing cancer drugs that they might otherwise have been unable to get. It is regrettable that, in some cases, cancer sufferers here may be unable to access treatments that are readily available in other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, in the Republic of Ireland.

The mainland is an interesting case study. Regional variations have developed between England and Scotland and Wales, where a specific cancer drugs fund has not been developed. That has created a divide in cancer care. We could all learn from that example. We need to look actively at ways to alleviate differentiation and to prioritise helping those who are most in need, thus increasing the chances of their lives being extended. Improving access to drugs is crucial in the fight against cancer. We need to try to reduce the time that is required to apply for drugs and to access new medicines. Of course, when we consider the fund, we cannot focus purely on cancer. We must recognise the fact that, unfortunately, there are other life-threatening diseases for which significant financial support is also needed.

I urge the Minister to consider the creation of a cancer drugs fund, which would be an effective tool in trying to reduce the impact of cancer on those who suffer from that devastating disease. I support the motion.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. We will resume the debate after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Conall McDevitt.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will follow the lead of Wales and bring forward proposals to embed the ethos of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in legislation. (AQO 973/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The concluding observations issued in October 2008 by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, recommended that a Northern Ireland bill of rights would be an appropriate vehicle to bring the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into legislation here. The issue is not a devolved matter, and, therefore, the Northern Ireland Office has been considering proposals from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on a bill of rights. The UK Government published consultation responses on a bill of rights here in December 2010, but the Member will be aware that there is no political consensus on the nature of any possible bill of rights in Northern Ireland. As part of a separate process, Ken Clarke, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, has set up a commission to investigate the creation of a UK bill of rights. We will examine any proposals that may come forward in relation to children's rights. In the meantime, we will continue to consider the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in emerging legislation, policy and practice.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the junior Minister for his answer. It is important to highlight the British Government's failure to bring forward a bill of rights. Taking on board Wales's lead, will the junior Minister confirm whether the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Executive will look at separate legislation to ensure that children's rights are rightly embedded in all policy decisions and, more importantly, across all Departments?

Mr Bell: The First Minister and the deputy First Minister are clear that we should embed children's rights in all our work, whether it is the work that Martina Anderson and I are taking forward in connection with the child poverty strategy, in lifetime opportunities for children or in the Executive's 10-year strategy. We intend to deliver directly on the issue of children's rights.

One practical example of that is in children's participation. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister sponsored an event that was hosted by the Children's Commissioner, for which we have responsibility. The event

was hugely well attended by various groups and people from Translink to Assembly Members, and it was all about rewarding good practice in children's participation. That is just one example of the many examples that we want to take forward as we embed children's rights in all our policy and practice.

Mrs Hale: Will the junior Minister inform the Assembly what progress has been made in reinvigorating the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people?

Mr Bell: I thank the Member for Lagan Valley for her question. There are three key aspects to what we intend to do in the ministerial subcommittee and in the bilateral meetings that Martina Anderson and I have taken forward with each of the Executive Ministers. As I said to Sue Ramsey, that work is about ensuring that we have a collaborative approach that adds value to what is there and is cross-cutting across all Departments.

We want to see the mainstreaming of the work that we are taking forward. We have considered the role and function of the ministerial subcommittee through bilateral meetings with colleagues in the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Social Development. We have discussed how we can better operate the ministerial subcommittee and how we can work together to streamline, link and progress the work around policy for children and young people.

Mrs Dobson: The 2008 concluding observations and recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that, aside from Wales, in the UK:

"the right to play and leisure is not fully enjoyed by all children".

What action is the Department taking to rectify that?

Mr Bell: As junior Ministers, we attended the play strategy and co-ordination event here. It is important that, when we act to deliver on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we continue to support the work not only in play and leisure but in children's participation across all Departments. I assure the Member that we are committed to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and we support ministerial colleagues to do so in a co-ordinated fashion. So where there are issues, such as play and leisure, that cut across Departments, we will seek to ensure that we have a cross-cutting function that co-ordinates the important roles of play and leisure and takes them forward.

Mr Eastwood: What additional measures does OFMDFM intend to enact to ensure the economic rights of children, given the recent very disturbing figures relating to child poverty?

Mr Bell: It is difficult to disaggregate the work that is being done on child poverty from that which is being done on family poverty; the question is which is which. We are specifically targeting work to ensure that children have the right skills not only to make them employable but to allow them to offer those skills in the future. We want to give those young people a better way out. Work will shortly conclude on the consultation on the social investment fund, which will specifically look at addressing measures that are already there. As was indicated, that work will focus on families who are living in poverty. Last week, the First

Minister and the deputy First Minister unveiled an initiative on fuel poverty. It will ensure that family members who suffer from cancer or have had treatment within the past six months, pensioners who are on pension credit and are suffering and need help, families on income support or jobseeker's allowance or families living with a member on employment and support allowance will benefit from an additional measure that will help to alleviate fuel poverty and child poverty in their household.

Mr Speaker: The Member is not in her place to ask question 2. I call Tom Elliott.

DOJ: Initial Ministerial Provision

3. **Mr Elliott** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have had any detailed discussions on the review of the initial ministerial provision in relation to the Department of Justice. (AQO 975/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: On 29 November 2011, the Assembly noted the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on its review of the initial ministerial provision for the Department of Justice. The deputy First Minister and I have had initial discussions on the matter. The issue was also raised during a meeting with Executive party leaders on 5 December 2011, and, in consequence of that meeting, an options paper was distributed this morning for their consideration.

Mr Elliott: I thank the First Minister for that. I acknowledge that we received the options paper from the Department this morning. I wonder whether there have been any discussions between the First Minister and the deputy First Minister about the possibility of using this opportunity to reduce the number of Departments in the Executive.

Mr P Robinson: In the Member's capacity as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, he will be aware that the options paper that was provided includes options that indicate consideration of the number of Departments. Of course, that will also be an opportunity for Members who follow through on the draft Programme for Government, because one of its aspects was to look at the overall provisions of the Assembly during 2012. The matter will certainly be raised, whether at this stage or at that stage. He, of course, will have a full role in considering that element of Justice 2012 over the next number of weeks. I hope that the matter can be resolved fairly quickly and painlessly. It seems that the positions that most people recognise are manageable. I would expect that the matter could be resolved within weeks rather than months.

Mr Frew: How will the process be taken forward?

Mr P Robinson: We have the meetings of the party leaders. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee, helpfully, asked each of the parties for their views. Some provided those views in more detail than others; I do not know whether they were keeping their cards close to their chest at this stage. However, the Committee has provided us with the opinions of each of the parties on that basis. We have drawn up the options paper.

In truth, the options really fall around two stems. One is, effectively, the present system, whereby the Assembly decides on the Justice Minister through a cross-community

vote, and the alternative is to do it by d'Hondt. There are a number of permutations surrounding each of those options, but they seem to be the two areas that are to be considered. They will be considered by each of the parties, and the deputy First Minister and I have a responsibility to bring forward proposals. We want that to be informed by the views of the party leaders.

Mr A Maginness: Does the First Minister recognise the gerrymander that brought about the election of the Alliance Party Minister of Justice? Does he also recognise the unfairness that has emanated from that, as a result of which the Alliance Party now has two Members in the Executive whereas the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP have one, yet the Alliance Party has less —

Mr Speaker: Order. Can the Member come to his question?

Mr A Maginness: — than half the number of Members of those other parties in the Assembly?

Mr P Robinson: There were two questions, and the quick answers are no and yes. No, I do not accept it as a gerrymander. The Member is stretching credulity to suggest that having a cross-community vote in the Assembly to determine a Minister who can gain support from both sections of our community is a gerrymander, and I do not think that anybody could describe it as such. Indeed, it indicates a higher level of approval because other Ministers have no approval other than that of their party leader. However, I do not suggest that that is a bad thing for Ministers to have.

The Member's second question was whether that has produced a disproportionate share for the Alliance Party. Yes, it has, and, of course, that can be considered during the present consultation.

Mr Speaker: I warn Members — I continually say it in this House — that they need to continually rise in their place at the right time. There is no point in Members getting up halfway and then not rising to their feet continually. Members will get in only if they rise continually in their place.

Mr Dickson: Does the First Minister agree that the cross-community nature of the appointment of the Minister of Justice has delivered for us and that, whatever happens following the discussions with the AERC and the Assembly, the most important thing is that the Assembly retains a devolved Minister of Justice?

Mr P Robinson: Absolutely. There were dire warnings from some predictable sources of how the stars were going to fall if policing and justice powers were devolved. Like many other dire warnings from the same source, that did not manifest itself. It is important that we continue to hold the powers of policing and justice in the Assembly. After all, former unionist leaders fought hard to have them devolved to Northern Ireland. It is important, therefore, that we have a Northern Ireland Justice Minister who enjoys the widespread support of the community.

Military Sites: Audit Office Report

4. **Dr McDonnell** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions they intend to take in light of the recent Audit Office report into the purchase, use and management of six former military sites. (AQO 976/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: As the Member for South Belfast will be aware, the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the transfer of former military and security sites to the Executive will be the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing. It is important, therefore, that any immediate comment on the report should not pre-empt or prejudice any evidence that might be given at that PAC hearing. However, it is our intention to put in place a strategy for the implementation of the relevant recommendations outlined in the report.

Dr McDonnell: Given the constraints that the First Minister has mentioned, can he give us any estimate of how much money the incompetence highlighted in the report has cost the Northern Ireland taxpayer?

Mr P Robinson: It might be worthwhile my pointing something out, because the BBC managed to get it entirely wrong in its initial headlines. This report covers the period of the early stage of devolution under the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP and, following that, a long period of direct rule. All the decisions, therefore, relate to that period. I am loath to pick over the bones of what predecessors did and the cost that there might have been. However, it is sufficient to say that I have no doubt that they acted with all sincerity and made the best judgement that they could at the time.

A number of elements of the report are about issues such as monitoring, timetabling and ensuring that decisions are carried through, as opposed to being about particular financial concerns. The one case that the Member might be referring to is that in his constituency about the sale of property there. I am loath to make any comment, because I am pretty sure that the officials concerned will want to comment on that when it comes to the PAC hearing.

2.45 pm

Mr Lyttle: At what stage are discussions with the RUAS about the potential for the Balmoral show to be hosted at the former Maze site, with the target date of spring 2013 in mind?

Mr P Robinson: I knew that I would be surprised if I saw the Member getting to his feet on this question. He had to retract a statement that he put out indicating that the deputy First Minister and I would have questions to answer on the NIAO report because he realised that we were not in office at that time.

Discussions on the Maze site are at an advanced stage, and we hope that we will be able to have a positive outcome very soon.

Mr Spratt: The First Minister clarified that he cannot speak in any detail about the report because PAC proceedings will take place. However, what general assessment does the report make overall?

Mr P Robinson: I am pretty sure that Ministers find these reports very helpful. I am a lot more relaxed about this report, as it relates to a period when we did not have responsibility. However, in defence of the Ministers who had decisions to take during that period, a Minister has to take a decision on a live issue with all the other pressures that they have at that time and with all the competing interests in which they have to be engaged, and they have to deal with those issues while not focusing on any one particular

matter. There is a world of a difference between that position and that of the authors of an Audit Office report, which, in this case, took around two years to bring about. I am pretty sure that, if Ministers had two years to make a decision, were able to focus on one set of issues, did not have the pressure of competing matters and had the benefit of hindsight, decisions would be a lot better.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the First Minister give any indication of when the report's recommendations will be implemented?

Mr P Robinson: It would be wrong to give any indication of that other than to say that it will happen as soon as possible. Obviously, we have to allow the PAC to consider the matter and to report to us. However, anyone who reads the report will see that some of its recommendations make common sense, so preparations are being made already.

Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly

5. **Mr McMullan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the plans for the former military base site at Shackleton. (AQO 977/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The former military base at Shackleton was transferred to the Executive on 7 October this year. Specialist advice on the options for the site is being prepared by the Executive's asset management unit. That advice will consider possible future uses of the site based on its potential, including the possible sale, rental or transfer of parcels of land or buildings. This work will also examine options for minimising running costs in the short term and any potential constraints, such as access or contamination, and how those might be overcome. The range of possible options identified will be thoroughly and robustly examined and will be subject to economic appraisal.

Mr McMullan: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the development of the Shackleton site should benefit the community as well as address the financial needs of the Executive?

Mr P Robinson: The Member asks that question as if those two factors were different. If it meets the needs of the Executive, of course it is in the interests of the community. I suspect that he means the more local community in the area. Yes, we would hope that anything that happens on that site would help the economy and social well-being of the people in that district.

Mr G Robinson: Until such times as the future of the site is settled, will the farmers who currently rent land at the base be able to avail themselves of the same arrangements?

Mr P Robinson: The arrangements are ongoing. I do not know whether any leases are about to end and would therefore have to be renegotiated, but the sale would not change any of the legal responsibilities that the MOD had entered into. The site's potential is quite significant, and I hope that those who have been somewhat critical of the decision of the deputy First Minister and me to issue a direction go and have a look at the site. This is a site of almost 300 acres with almost 1 million sq ft of buildings. It has massive potential. Perhaps, the original offer was based more on the likelihood of any one purchaser wanting to use the whole of that site. I think that the potential for the site

being broken down into parcels or individual buildings being sold, transferred or rented might be greater.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Ministers' decision to acquire the site. Has the MOD been approached to make a generous contribution towards the clean-up, which I understand includes substantial quantities of asbestos, lead from the shooting range and a bomb dumped from the Second World War?

Mr P Robinson: For all the sites that we take over, the arrangement is that we take over the responsibility. That does not mean that, in disposing of parts of the land, we do not hand on that responsibility to the purchaser. At the same time, it needs to be pointed out that the decontamination issues at Shackleton are very different from those of the Maze. By and large the Maze site is being cleared, and new buildings will go on it. In the case of Shackleton, with 1 million sq ft of buildings we probably do not need to build too many more. Therefore, the issue of decontamination does not come to the fore in the same way. Use of land around it may well bring that into play, and we would need to look at the costs in relation to the benefits before we go down that road.

Mr Kinahan: Will the First Minister outline the negotiations that took place around the gifting of the Shackleton site and tell us whether he believes that it is a good deal, given that £8 million has so far been spent on decontaminating the site, which you touched on?

Mr P Robinson: As a general rule, getting 300 acres, almost 1 million sq ft for nothing seems to me to be reasonably good deal. I do not know anybody offering a better one.

Social Investment Fund

6. **Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the £80 million social investment fund will be allocated across the four strategic objectives contained in the consultation paper on the fund. (AQO 978/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Decisions on the allocation of funding will be based on prioritised need under the context of poverty. It will, therefore, be spread across the four strategic objectives according to the needs identified in the strategic area plans in each social investment zone. Currently, there is no set budget for each of the strategic objectives. It is proposed that one plan will be brought forward from each zone. The area plans will need to identify how resources should be allocated and how the maximum possible impact on the ground will be achieved.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his answer. The objectives of the social investment fund are to increase community services, to build pathways to employment, to tackle the systemic issues linked to deprivation and to address dereliction. I am particularly concerned about the eight investment zones that have been identified. Does the First Minister agree that mid-Ulster would merit inclusion, and if not, why not?

Mr P Robinson: I am not sure — maybe the Member will tell me afterwards — of the number of neighbourhood renewal areas and areas at risk, which is probably the basis on which the zones were originally set up, that there are in mid-Ulster. However, the consultation document is out for people to make their comments until 23 December. I am

pretty sure that there will be comments about the zones and recommendations on how they might be changed. If the Member feels that there is a particular case for mid-Ulster — I have already heard such a case from the Benches behind me — she will want to put that to us in the consultation process, and we will consider it. We have already had some suggestions about alternative zones.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us whether areas that suffer from high levels of poverty and disadvantage but are not specifically mentioned in the social investment fund consultation document will be able to receive funding from the £80 million fund?

Mr P Robinson: There is provision in the document for areas to be attached to zones. Again, I make the point that the zones have not been finalised. This is one of the areas where the deputy First Minister and I cannot really win. If we simply allow people to understand the concept and ask them to give us their views, they will say to us, “Will you not put out a document for us to look at and to amend?”. When we then put out a document for that purpose, people say that they do not like this, that or the other and ask us why we have done it. It is simply there as a consultation document. We are not rigid about the elements of it, and it is our best guess about how a workable scheme can be brought forward. If the Member has in mind any specific location that he believes should be brought into the zones, we will be happy to listen to him.

If the Member’s question is about whether the general concept of poverty falls within the scope, my answer is that yes, of course, it does. We want to look at all the areas that are suffering most, right across the Province. This proposal came forward because the deputy First Minister and I were concerned that, while devolution was helping large swathes of our society, the benefits of devolution were being felt less in the section of the community that was most vulnerable and had the greatest need. Therefore, we designed a programme that would direct attention to those areas.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister is more than aware that I have raised this matter on a number of occasions in respect of my constituency. I will put that to the side for once. Will the First Minister give an assurance that the views of people who take the time to respond to the consultation will be listened to and that changes will be made to the proposals if necessary?

Mr P Robinson: As with any consultation exercise that we carry out, we take very seriously the views that come in. For instance, at the moment, we are dealing with the consultation on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy, and people who have been working on that from each of the parties will know how seriously we take the views that we have received from the consultees. In relation to this issue, I will be very surprised if the final document is in precisely the same form as the existing one.

3.00 pm

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Commemorations

1. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department’s preparations to

mark the forthcoming decade of anniversaries, including the centenary of the Ulster Covenant in 2012 and the centenary of the foundation of Northern Ireland. (AQO 988/11-15)

2. **Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the engagements or consultations that her Department is undertaking in relation to the forthcoming decade of commemorations. (AQO 989/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 2 together.

The forthcoming decade of centenaries and commemorations of significant events provides us all with an opportunity to achieve a greater understanding of our past and how it shapes and identifies our relationships today. The key issue is not only what we remember and commemorate, but how we remember. The Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund have developed a set of principles to help organisations to remember the past in the context of an inclusive and accepting society. I endorse those principles.

The arts and cultural sectors can play a key role in how the stories of our past are told and shared with a wider audience. I am, therefore, continuing discussions with the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the dissemination and use of those principles. To that end, I have met my counterpart, Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD, who is chairing the Oireachtas Consultation Group on Commemorations. The Public Record Office is also updating and refreshing the existing Ulster Covenant website resource.

Mr Moutray: A recent ‘Belfast Telegraph’ poll demonstrated clearly that the vast majority of citizens in Northern Ireland, Protestants and Roman Catholics alike, want Northern Ireland to remain an integral part of the United Kingdom. Given that fact, will the Minister give an undertaking that she and her Department will represent that section of people and play a full role in celebrating the centenary of the Ulster Covenant, as it is a momentous occasion in Northern Ireland’s calendar?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to tell the Member that the commemoration of the Ulster Covenant is one of the activities that we will have on the suite for remembrance. The comments made by the Member about the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ are purely political, and I have no wish to comment on them.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for her response so far. Does she agree that as Northern Ireland seeks to move on from the past, these commemorations are an opportunity, not to rewrite history, but to come to terms with it truthfully and to focus on what unites us, rather than on what divides us?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question and agree with all that she has said. There is a diverse and extensive range of significant events, and the important thing is to approach them in a sensitive and inclusive way. We cannot tell members of the public what they should remember but we should encourage people to take the approach that the Member outlined.

Mrs McKevitt: What criteria are being used to establish the centenary anniversaries that will be supported by the Minister’s Department over the next decade?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First and foremost, they should be centenary events, but which centenaries will be supported is being decided. My predecessor had listed the commemoration of the Ulster Covenant, anniversaries from the period 1912-1922, and the Plantation. I do not feel that those events are inclusive, so I am encouraging other centenary events that are coming up, such as the 1913 lockout and suffrage for men and limited suffrage for women. I think that those centenaries will help to provide a more inclusive suite of events for commemoration.

Mr Allister: The year 2012 also marks Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport in London is overseeing that event. What co-operation has the Minister's Department had with the London Department? What plans does she have to celebrate it and will she meet Her Majesty if she comes to visit Northern Ireland during Her Jubilee?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had no discussions with the Department for Culture in England, so, my answer is no to his first question and no to his second question.

Girdwood Barracks, Belfast: Multisports Facility

3. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the Minister for Social Development in relation to the creation of a multisports facility at the Girdwood Barracks site. (AQO 990/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had no discussions with the Minister for Social Development about a multi-sports facility. The creation of a multi-sports facility at the Girdwood Barracks site is a matter for the Department for Social Development (DSD), which owns the site. However, I understand that Belfast City Council, which is responsible for the provision of leisure and recreational facilities in the Belfast area, has been in discussion with DSD regarding plans to develop a multipurpose sports hall on the site. I look forward to the outcome of those discussions.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. A report by Sport NI in 2009 stated that Belfast was 290 acres short of facilities. How does she hope to encourage the city council and her Department to meet that need in Belfast?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I met Belfast City Council recently in relation to its pitches strategy and the lack of certain sports facilities in Belfast. Those discussions have now been advanced with Sport NI. There are gaps in sports provision across the North, but in relation to Belfast, the Department and the chief executive of Sport NI are trying to plot a way forward from 2015 onwards and to make sure that it relates to my Sport Matters strategy. The Member is right to raise the issue. There are huge gaps in sporting provision, but the difficulty is that we do not have the budget to meet all those demands.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answer. The decision by Belfast City Council to develop a community hub that would include sports facilities on the Girdwood site is an excellent idea. Will the Minister encourage the council, and if necessary, contribute financially to the development of that hub as a centre of excellence so that it will attract people from right across the city and develop a site that is shared by all and does not become sectarianised?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. He has raised key issues. First, my Department contributing to the community hub was not in the budget line but we are working with Sport NI and the chief executive in relation to future contributions. I agree that the multi-sports element is one aspect of that. The site needs regeneration, and sport, arts and the creative industries have a role to play. I look forward to our Department playing a role in the regeneration of much needed facilities for people in north Belfast.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Minister for her answers. Does the Minister agree that the development of the Girdwood site on the basis of the Dunlop/Toner report — a shared site for the benefit of all the people of north Belfast — is the way forward?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I absolutely agree with the Member. It is key that the people who live around the Girdwood site are involved in the consultations and plans for the way forward. The last thing that we need in north Belfast is another development where the people who live outside are looking in, with no opportunities at all.

Ulster Scots: East Antrim

4. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the Ulster-Scots tradition is promoted in the East Antrim area. (AQO 991/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster-Scots tradition is promoted by my Department in the east Antrim area through projects, programmes and events funded by the Ulster-Scots Agency, the Arts Council and libraries. Projects are varied, and include funding for an arts development officer, music and dance tuition, developing musicians' skills, community festivals, school activities and a development award towards research into music and oral tradition in and around Ballymoney, resulting in the creation of a number of CDs, publications and promotional material.

Mr Beggs: Thank you for your answer. Will the Minister advise her Department and agency to assist volunteer-led organisations, such as the Broadisland Gathering and the Cairncastle Ulster-Scots community, to draw down funding so that they maximise the benefit of local tourism and the proportion of money used for central administration is also reduced by spending it in the community?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In fairness, I think that the Ulster-Scots Agency has done that. The Member will be aware — if he is not, I am happy to provide him with the details — that it recently reprofiled its marketing budget to make sure that the money was going towards facilities and services and responding to the needs of people in that area. I have commended the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency in the House. Its primary objective is to make sure that the money goes towards the projects that are needed in the area and that it is supporting and developing the use of volunteers in the activities that I have mentioned and others.

Mr Hilditch: Knowing some of the initial work that has commenced, will the Minister today give a commitment to support the establishment of an Ulster-Scots trail, which will include east Antrim?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. I, along with my colleague junior Minister Jonathan Bell, recently launched a programme through British-Irish Council sectoral meetings on languages called Slí Cholmcille, which looked at the trails from east to west. That is through the British-Irish arrangements. We are looking at options, through the North/South approach, to develop better east-west relationships. Those are crucial, particularly in relation to developing cultural trails for the Ulster-Scots community.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What projects has the Arts Council supported in east Antrim?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There have been quite a few. The Arts Council has provided £50,000 for activities through its annual support for organisations programme (ASOP). The lottery project has also provided £25,000 for an arts development officer. Through small grants programmes, Cairncastle community and cultural group has received £6,000 for development of music and skills programmes. Indeed, there is cultural awareness in developing music skills. The Ulster-Scots Agency has invested at least £10,000 in developing funds for the arts development fund award. Those are just some examples. If the Member wants to write to me about anything specific, I will be happy to respond.

Mr Durkan: Has the Minister been contacted by any other traditional language body about a promotion similar to Líofa 2015?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I am in discussions with the Ulster-Scots Agency about bringing forward a Líofa-type event, although it will be about heritage and culture rather than language. Those discussions are ongoing. It is really important that whatever is forwarded for sponsorship by my Department has consensus and is a response to community need rather than just a response to something that was done for the Irish language, as it may not work for the Ulster-Scots community. I look forward to seeing those proposals early in the new year.

2012 Olympics: Training

5. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many teams have expressed an interest in using Northern Ireland as a base for pre-Olympic Games training. (AQO 992/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To date, Sport NI has secured three pre-games training camps in the run-up to the London 2012 games. The three teams are the Chinese artistic gymnastics team, the Australian boxing team and the Irish Paralympics team. In addition, a number of pre-games events involving international athletes have taken place in the North. Those are the Boccia World Cup, which is a 2012 Paralympics qualifying event, a table tennis tournament and the Yonex Irish International Badminton Championships, which is a 2012 Olympic qualifying event. Sport NI is involved in sensitive negotiations with a number of other countries about pre-games training and qualifying events. It is a highly competitive process, and, therefore, I am unable to detail the countries or sports involved.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her answer. What action will she take to ensure that whatever the final list of teams that locate themselves in Northern Ireland, those teams

will make a contribution to the sporting life and, indeed, economy of Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his original question and, indeed, his supplementary. That is vital. I attended the badminton qualifying event in Lisburn yesterday. It was clear that a number of people who attended those events, particularly the young badminton players, got a lot out of them. I am not sure what the economic benefits for Lisburn were, but I know that at least 50 people stayed in local hotels, ate in local restaurants and may have gone to a few local pubs. The young athletes got an awful lot out of the weekend of badminton qualifying events.

Mr Eastwood: Does the Minister share my disappointment at the response from international teams so far in respect of their coming to train here? I appreciate that work is ongoing. Does she believe that all that can be done is being done to attract more teams to come here to train?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of, and understand, the expectation that more countries would have secured our facilities. However, I am convinced that, as we speak, Sport NI is trying to ensure that there is clarification of any queries from countries that are coming here to use our facilities for pre-games training or qualifying events. I share the Member's concern. By January or February 2012, we will be reviewing the position, but, at the minute, I understand that very sensitive negotiations are under way, so we will have to wait to see the outcome of those.

2012 Olympics: Security

6. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what level of co-operation she will have with the British security services to ensure the safety of teams involved in pre-event training in Northern Ireland for the 2012 Olympics. (AQO 993/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The safety of teams that are visiting here for pre-games training is the responsibility of the PSNI. My Department has engaged with the PSNI to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place in the run-up to and during the games.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her answer. The Home Office of Her Majesty's Government has indicated that intelligence gathering will form a vital part of security preparations before the Olympics. Does the Minister support the security services in taking such action and will she assure the House that there will be no infringement by her to ensure that that does not affect the safety of the visiting teams?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The PSNI is represented on a number of groups. It established, monitors and is represented on a number of groups that ensure the safety of every athlete visiting here. In turn, the PSNI advises my Department. To date, the PSNI has not advised me of the concerns that the Member raised. If the Member has any information that he thinks should be going to the PSNI, I would expect him to supply that with all haste.

3.15 pm

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her answer. What discussions has she had with the Minister of Enterprise,

Trade and Investment about maximising the tourist income from those attending the games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had no discussions with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, but our Departments are working very closely together. The Enterprise Minister and I will meet early in the new year to look at this and a few other issues relating to our Departments, with the idea of assisting in developing future tourist potential, particularly in sport, culture and the arts.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister acknowledge the inherent risk in a potential security breach during the pre-training phase in the run-up to the London Olympics? Can she tell the House whether she has met with the Chief Constable or senior PSNI officers to discuss risk management on that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not met the Chief Constable but I have had discussions with the PSNI and my Department. The PSNI is involved with my Department in the torch relay advisory and operations groups on these games and other activities. Other than that, I cannot add to what I said.

Mr Speaker: Once again, Members must continually rise in their place if they wish to ask a supplementary question. I could almost put that into a sermon.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister might have answered this but does she agree that the appropriate authority to deal with security is the PSNI? In her previous answer, she told us how many pre-Olympic events there are here and she said that she has ongoing engagement with the PSNI, which is the appropriate authority.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, is the short answer. I have had meetings with the PSNI. The Department continues to meet with the PSNI about the games. We met with the PSNI about the MTV awards and we will be meeting with it about next year's events as well. For big events in particular, discussions are ongoing, and the PSNI is involved in the operational committee that deals regularly with such matters.

Irish Language Act

7. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the costs incurred, to date, and the estimated implementation cost of the Irish language Act being drafted by her Department. (AQO 994/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No costs have been incurred to date on renewed proposals for an Irish Language Bill. The estimated costs for implementation have not yet been established, as the scoping work on the preferred legislative approach is ongoing.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for her short response. I find it somewhat difficult to understand how any preparation for any draft Act can come at little or no cost. Given that the introduction of an Irish language Act will require cross-community support in the Assembly, does the Minister accept that unless such support were forthcoming, preparing for such an Act would be a complete waste of time and money?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It does not take a pile of money to scope out what preferred approach needs to be taken around an Irish language Act. In fact, if it did, I would expect you to ask me why. Officials are already working on the issue. Regardless

of the latter question, I am preparing an Irish language Act, because this is about rights. Regardless of your position, that is what I intend to do.

Mrs Dobson: What is the Department's full legislative programme for the next three years? What other Acts does she envisage bringing forward?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said previously, I am preparing consultation on an Irish language Act. I am also bringing forward two separate strategies for the Irish language and for Ulster Scots. I have no list or itinerary of any other legislation that needs to be introduced, although that may change in the near future.

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

I thank the Minister for her answers. Indeed, her last answer leads into my question. Can the Minister outline when she will publish the details of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots strategies?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The two strategies should go forward for consultation round about the end of January and no later than the middle of February 2012.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. An féidir liom a fhiafraí den Aire cad iad na príomh-mholtaí a bheas i mBille na Gaeilge agus céin uair a fhoilseofar iad?

Will the Minister outline the main proposals in the Irish Language Bill? When will it be published? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms Ní Chuilín: In all seriousness, I am sure that the Member does not expect me to outline the full proposals during a two-minute question. The proposals for the Irish language Act deserve much more time than that. However, as I said to the Member in a previous Question Time, I am happy to meet him or any other Member on this issue. I believe that the Member is sincere about wanting a robust Irish language Act that is based on rights.

Creative Industries: Architecture

8. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the role that architecture plays within the creative industries, particularly in relation to competing for business on a worldwide basis. (AQO 995/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Architecture is a key component of our local creative industries. Most recent estimates indicate that the sector contributes almost £150 million or approximately 20% of the total £737 million GVA generated by the creative industries here.

The Executive's draft economic strategy identifies export-focused growth as a key driver to rebuild and rebalance our economy. The architecture sector can, therefore, be to the fore among our creative industries in accessing new markets and showcasing our creativity and innovation on the world stage.

My Department developed and supports policy on architecture and the built environment, and, today, I met a ministerial advisory group on architecture, which brings together expertise in architecture, conservation, preservation and sustainable development around planning.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. Most architects in Northern Ireland rely on local developments and on the local building trade, which has seen a downturn in construction. What support does her Department give to architects — rather than simply advising them on policy and on how buildings should look — to get them out on the world stage to promote their talents further afield?

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not have a role in directly funding architects. My responsibility is around policy and policy development, but I take on board the Member's concern, particularly around graduates going through university, qualifying and coming out and finding no work. In respect of what role Departments can have in giving them support, the ministerial advisory group may be able to advise the entire Executive on that, and I am happy to forward the Member's comments to them. I met them just this morning but I will be meeting them again around the beginning of January and I will forward that on to see whether there are any proposals to support not just new architecture graduates but existing architects who cannot get any work.

Mr Agnew: What engagement has the Minister had with the Education Minister and the Employment and Learning Minister with regard to ensuring that our school curriculum, as well as work in further education colleges, is maximising the benefits of the growth sector that is the creative industries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is certainly wedging a supplementary question into one on which it has very little bearing, but I am happy to answer it. I will meet the Minister of Education next week on that and a few other issues. I will meet him to discuss creative industries and languages. It is important that Ministers have a joined-up approach, particularly in relation to new and emerging industries. I assume that the Member was alluding, if not directly referring, to having those new and emerging industries reflected in our school curriculum.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that their supplementary questions must relate to the original question on the Order Paper.

DCAL: Job Creation

9. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the action, and the proposed timescale, that her Department intends to take to contribute to achieving the draft Programme for Government target of creating 25,000 jobs. (AQO 996/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has a Programme for Government target of supporting 200 projects by 2015 through the creative industries innovation fund. Those will help to develop the sector by encouraging innovation and export-focused growth. In 2012, I intend to finalise the collaborative framework for the creative industries to stimulate partnership between industry, government and academia. That will help our creative industries to compete and to succeed on a world stage.

During the recent Belfast music week and MTV EMAs, my Department and Invest NI published a new music industry strategy to support the growth of that key subsector. The development of sports stadiums, as agreed with the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby, will also give a significant boost to

the construction industry. Hosting the World Police and Fire Games in 2013 and Derry's year as City of Culture will, similarly, support further growth and the development of our tourism industry.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am always critical when I see, without detail, such targets as 25,000 jobs. You have given us some detail as to how you expect to find those 25,000 jobs. Would the Minister consider setting up think tanks or groupings of people with expertise to bounce ideas around, so that we can come up with other ideas that may help us to create the jobs quicker?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would. Last week, I was at NICVA and I talked to the community and voluntary sector and, in particular, the arts sector about work, my priorities and ways forward. There were some excellent suggestions. To that end, I am looking at roundtable discussions on sports. I am also looking at the arts and creative industries. Although the figure of 200 is there, I am keen to see whether that can be increased. I need to talk to people in the industry to find out how that happens. I thank the Member for his question.

Salmon

10. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what are the current levels of salmon stock in the Clough, Braid and Maine rivers compared to 10 years ago. (AQO 997/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that I need a gold medal for this, a Cheann Comhairle. I think that this is an Olympic record.

My Department commissions the monitoring of adult salmon runs on the Maine river system by means of a fish counter, which came into operation in 2002. The counter indicates that although there has been some annual variation, the number of salmon recorded in 2010 is similar to that recorded in 2002. Salmon fry are also assessed on the Maine, Clough and Braid rivers. The data since 2002 shows considerable viability, but the trend is one of decline in salmon fry, particularly on the Braid river.

I have a long answer in front of me, but I am happy to supply the Member with that in writing.

Mr Frew: Has the Minister concerns around irresponsible catching or poaching on those rivers?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do. Conservation around that is the responsibility of my Department in conjunction with others. We need to actively look at measures to ensure that conservation limits are preserved.

Private Members' Business

Cancer Drugs Fund

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give consideration to the creation of a cancer drugs fund. — [Mr Ross.]

Mr McDevitt: I support the motion tabled in the names of Mr Ross and others. There is clear merit in giving full consideration to the opportunity of establishing a cancer drugs fund in Northern Ireland.

Combinations of problems with the processes used by NICE, the medicine's pricing system and local mechanisms for determining access to treatment have meant that many thousands of cancer patients have been denied access to life-extending cancer treatments that their clinicians wished to prescribe for them. As a result of those problems, the usage of newer cancer drugs is significantly lower in these jurisdictions than elsewhere in the world.

3.30 pm

Measures have been put in place to ensure a fairer system for determining access to cancer drugs. However, despite those measures, many thousands of cancer patients have continued to be denied clinically effective life-extending cancer drugs that their clinician wished to prescribe for them. A cancer drugs fund, therefore, has the potential to have a great impact on the treatments available to patients with advanced forms of cancer who live here. Those are not my words; they are words in the summary of key findings in a recent report published by the Rarer Cancers Foundation in England.

Like many colleagues — in fact, I suspect, every colleague in the House — my family has been touched by cancer. We will mark the sixth anniversary of my father's passing in two days' time. He fell victim to cancer, like so many, as did my mother, whose anniversary we will remember in January. However, what is particularly upsetting to the families of so many of us who have witnessed the slow, inevitable decline of someone with a life-limiting cancer is the extent to which medicine can make them kind of better, then worse, then better again and then worse. However, it is not just that. It is the knowledge that there is potentially another clinical option — another treatment of South Antrim, I support the motion tabled by option — that could make them a little bit better. It is an option that could break the cycle, offer them a better quality of life, a longer life expectation and, in some cases, the possibility of a near-permanent reversal of their condition. Yet, in this region, we seem to play things conservatively.

I return to the report, which is in Members' packs, and I commend it to colleagues who have not had the chance to read it. In arguing the case for the cancer drugs fund in England, the foundation pointed out that it has succeeded in improving access to treatment for more than 2,500 patients. It says that there have been some implementation problems and that it is clear that much can be learned from the initial six months to ensure that all patients gain fair access to treatments, irrespective of where they live and no strategic health authority (SHA) — the local

hospital trust area — adopts an unnecessarily restrictive approach. Nonetheless, as the report points out, the cancer drugs fund has been welcomed by patients and clinicians and represents a significant step towards ensuring that people with advanced forms of cancer receive comparable standards of treatment and care to those in other countries.

There is much about the fund to commend it. It offers the opportunity for clinical autonomy and accountability; it allows us to think laterally about how we commission what is known in healthcare-speak as high-cost interventions; and it enables patients to purchase additional private treatment without losing their entitlement to NHS treatment. Those are all things that we would want to think about, particularly at this time of such change and reform in our health service, and we look forward to the Minister's statement on that tomorrow. It also allows for value-based pricing, which is something that Mr Ross is very interested in. All of us with an interest in health economics should be interested in it. I, for one, welcome the opportunity —

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

Mr McDevitt: — to make a contribution to the debate, and I call on colleagues on all sides of the House to show some generosity and support the motion.

Ms Lewis: As a Member of the Health Committee and a Member for the constituency of South Antrim, I support the motion tabled by my colleagues

Many Members have mentioned that they know or knew someone who has battled or is battling cancer. They may even have battled it themselves. It is a terrible disease. I praise all those who work with cancer patients to make their life better. I also praise charitable groups such as the Ulster Cancer Foundation, Cancer Research UK and Action Cancer, which do so much, be it lobbying for cancer patients or providing desperately needed assistance to sufferers and their families. Their commitment and service to the community is invaluable.

I also highlight the work of Macmillan and all that it does. I welcome its comments this morning about the debate and its support for the Minister. It is clear that his drive to refocus the provision of cancer care is one of the most tangible examples of the Assembly beginning to deliver the benefits of devolution to the people. However, more needs to be done to ensure that cancer patients receive the best available treatment and medicine to combat that terrible disease, which places huge stress on the patient and their family.

I, like many others, am concerned about cancer patients' access to particular drugs that are available elsewhere in the United Kingdom or the rest of the world. Although procedures differ slightly here, there is a concern in some quarters that cancer patients in Northern Ireland are not getting the treatment that is available elsewhere, particularly in relation to accessing certain drugs. We have a situation where patients in Northern Ireland are unable to access drugs that may be available in other parts of the UK, never mind the differences in access to certain drugs in the UK as a whole compared with the rest of the world.

In 2010, the coalition Government in Westminster launched the cancer drugs fund to help patients to access life-extending drugs that may be of help to them but are not

available in the health service. In April this year, the fund was increased from £50 million to £200 million. I urge the Minister to look at ways in which that could be replicated in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the Executive's £5 million of additional funding to the Department in the October monitoring round. It means that new cancer drugs for lung cancer, leukaemia and multiple myeloma can be funded this year. I recognise that that will need to be paid for further down the line, but I believe that most of us are willing to pay a little more if we are guaranteed the best possible service in return. To that end, I acknowledge Macmillan's assertion that we, as an Assembly, need to develop strong monitoring processes to ensure that the new money and system is effective in ensuring that all patients get equitable access to the right treatment and care.

In a speech at the Ulster Cancer Foundation's annual general meeting recently, the Minister assured those in attendance that improving cancer services remains a top priority for him. I welcome that. It is yet another example of his commitment not only to cancer patients but to all those who require medical assistance under the health service.

I welcome the motion, and I join my colleagues in asking the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to seriously consider the introduction of a similar fund.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the honourable Member for tabling the motion and other Members for their valuable, thoughtful and sometimes very personal contributions. I appreciate that everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to this issue. I will try to respond to as many as possible of the issues that have been raised during the debate.

In my capacity as Health Minister, I have met many patients and families who have been afflicted by cancer. Their personal stories are truly inspirational. I assure them that I want to deliver a health service that is capable of providing the highest quality treatment and care for them. The little badge that I am wearing is an Ulster Cancer Foundation badge that is produced for Christmas each year. One of the most inspiring stories was that of a young mother whom I met there. When her children were aged three and one, her husband was diagnosed, and, sadly, he went on to lose his life and left her with the young children. However, she was getting on with life, and she was so brave. In doing that, she was an absolute inspiration. You want to seek to deliver the best outcomes for people. You want to avoid death where possible and provide the best care for those who need to receive palliative treatment at the same time.

Each year, 8,500 people are diagnosed with cancer, and, sadly, 3,600 people die from cancer. That is very significant. It is such a significant disease in Northern Ireland that we really need to ensure that we are doing our best to tackle it. Although the health service has made significant progress in the treatment of cancer in the past decade and has made huge improvements to patient outcomes, we still have more to do in that field in order to make our outcomes among the best in Europe. To an extent, we are falling behind some countries in that regard, so we have work to do to ensure that we close that gap.

The improvements that have been made to date have been brought about through investment in cancer services and,

increasingly, by a major refocusing on how the service is delivered. Cancer services have moved from a position where bits of cancer treatment were provided at all the hospitals, which resulted in a fragmented service with no uniform standard of care and outcomes that ranged from outstanding to poor. We have much better outcomes now because we have a network of dedicated cancer units, staffed by specialist multidisciplinary teams of doctors and nurses who provide the highest standards of treatment and care, where the patient is the focus of their care and where all the services provided are evidence-based and reviewed and the outcomes assessed. The units also operate within best-practice protocols and guidelines that are in place across the world.

All of that, of course, costs money, and, in Northern Ireland, we spend around £22 million annually on a range of cancer medicines. As Minister, I am determined to see that that investment is used effectively and, indeed, efficiently. My priority is to ensure that all patients here are able to access the full range of NICE-approved drugs, including cancer drugs. Members will be aware that the Executive approved £5 million of additional funding to my Department in the October monitoring round specifically for that purpose, which means that new drugs for lung cancer, leukaemia and multiple myeloma can be funded this year. I would like to put on record my thanks to the Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson, for accommodating my request for that funding. It is something that has rested heavily on me since I took office and came to understand that that outstanding gap existed. The allocation is of real importance in making it possible to correct the gap in access to cost-effective, evidencebased therapies in Northern Ireland. However, those drugs will need to be paid for in future years, and that is the reality we face. In that context, I am considering a range of options for how that might be done, including the potential reintroduction of some prescription charges. Such a decision would, of course, be subject to public consultation. This debate is, therefore, timely because it highlights the life-threatening aspect of cancer and the ability of modern drugs to help to fight it. If we were to introduce a small prescription charge, it would actually apply to only 11% of all prescriptions. We could potentially deal with the shortfall in money for NICE-approved drugs and set aside a modest amount to enable us to respond to the special cases that are outside NICE guidelines, such as the ones discussed today.

The decision that the Assembly, the Executive and I, as Minister, will have to make is whether to continue to help many a little or a few a lot. That is very challenging, but it is important that we give it due consideration. I will, therefore, want to go out to consultation early in the new year on whether we should reintroduce a prescription charge. If such a charge were reintroduced, it would not be done to bolster in some way other aspects of the DHSSPS budget but to specifically meet our requirements to buy NICE-approved drugs and, perhaps, to have the ability to buy further drugs that, although not NICE-approved, are for specific cases involving people suffering from cancer or some other significant ailment.

Although drugs are important in the treatment of cancer, they are not the only treatments we have. Radiotherapy and surgery are increasingly vital and effective treatments of choice, so we also need to allocate resources to them. Members will be aware that my first decision on coming to office was to give the go-ahead to the new radiotherapy unit

at Altnagelvin Area Hospital. Indeed, continuing to focus investment on areas that will produce the greatest benefit and improvement in cancer outcomes is the way forward.

3.45 pm

I want to see greater emphasis on prevention and early diagnosis. Cancer prevention and early detection have been shown to significantly improve patient outcomes from treatment, as well as decreasing the potential for reoccurrence. Eating the wrong food excessively, drinking heavily and smoking will lead to many of our population dying from cancer, very often in distressing circumstances. I make no apology for highlighting the negative outcomes and the need for people to change their lifestyle.

As Minister, I want to see Northern Ireland as a centre of excellence at the forefront of cancer treatment and research. That is why we continue to invest in cancer research here and why we need to ensure that we can get further research brought in from the rest of the UK. The cancer drugs fund, which is available only in England, was put in place to enable patients to access non-NICE-approved cancer drugs if consultants considered them beneficial. I understand that there will always be individual cases to consider. Those are dealt with on an individual basis, and patients here can access, through an individual funding request (IFR), non-NICE-approved drugs that their consultants consider to be of benefit. IFRs provide a mechanism to consider requests for treatment, including drugs and therapies and not limited to cancer, that fall outside the range of services normally commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board. Each request is sent to the board and considered on its merits. However, clinical exceptionality is expected to be demonstrated to support IFR requests.

Mr Humphrey raised the case of Carol Parkinson. Although I cannot comment on individual cases, he should be aware that an IFR has been refused on the grounds that exceptionality has not been demonstrated at this point. Mr Humphrey indicated that the oncologist supported her case. Perhaps that needs to be readdressed if issues have not been looked at. Obviously, if drugs are available that may change the circumstances and the outlook for that lady, we would, of course, want to ensure that she had every opportunity to live.

Every effort is made to provide rapid decisions on individual funding requests. Normally, requests are considered and a response provided to the referring clinician within seven days of the request being received. In the past three years, almost 98% of patients in Northern Ireland who had an IFR submitted on their behalf had the treatment approved.

The health service here has, for a number of years, procured cancer medicines on a regional basis, which has provided significant benefits in the cost and availability of those essential drugs. However, we have a higher expenditure on medicines than the rest of the UK, and some of them are not effective. I want to see that significantly reduced to allow the health service to reallocate that funding to more effective and proven treatments. We need to ensure that ineffective prescribing is not overinflating the cost differential. Therefore, we need to be more robust on occasion in challenging the public's perception of drugs that may not be as effective in delivering outcomes as people

may perceive. Some are in the habit of taking drugs, as opposed to them making a real difference.

We have to be realistic. The health service here is not always able to replicate the spending of other regions, and that can mean that access to some treatments may need to be introduced over time. We have all seen some of the sensational media headlines stating that patients outside England can be five times more likely to be denied cancer drugs. That is simply not factual. Although the cancer drugs fund in England has achieved some of its aims, it has not always been fully utilised. It has been suggested that a postcode lottery has developed in its application and that there is considerable variation in the way that it is administered across England, a situation that we do not want to see here. There also appears to be no guarantee that all patients who request a given medicine will receive it, even with the cancer fund.

The cancer drugs fund in England is a temporary scheme, lasting three years, which allows access to new and non-approved drugs. The coalition Government's proposal is to introduce value-based pricing as a replacement for the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS). The PPRS controls the price of propriety drugs across the UK, and we are fully signed up to avail ourselves of it. We should also be able to avail ourselves of its eventual replacement, if necessary, to ensure that we continue to obtain the best value for money and, most importantly, that all patients can access the new drugs and treatments that doctors think they need at a price that represents value for money.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Network (NICaN) has been instrumental in advancing cancer treatments here, and I pay tribute to the dedicated staff in NICaN, our cancer units and the Belfast cancer centre, which has worked tirelessly to ensure that our patients are not disadvantaged compared with those in the rest of the UK. As part of its role, NICaN leads the drugs and therapeutics committee, which has developed the regional process for the prioritisation of new drugs and therapies. The committee, which includes clinical representation from oncology and haematology, provides clear guidance and advice to the HSC Board on priorities for the commissioning of cancer drugs.

This year alone has seen major changes in how we deliver cancer treatment and care. In February, the cancer services framework was launched for implementation planning by the HSC Board commissioners and the Public Health Agency. I have asked the Public Health Agency to lead in this process and submit a plan to me by the end of the year.

In September, the NICE applicability process, which has been criticised for delaying access to new NICE-approved treatments, was revised. That will help to speed up the introduction of new approved drugs. Alongside that, considerable efforts have been made to improve waiting times for people with cancer, and my Department will continue to work closely with the trust and NICaN to ensure that patients have timely access to diagnosis and treatment, irrespective of where they live.

In summary, we have made significant progress, providing the very best cancer treatment and care. However, we cannot be complacent: we must do more, despite the difficult economic conditions. I assure the Assembly that access to the latest cancer treatments and drugs will

remain a high priority for me. So, it is important that, if the IFR is working, we enhance it. Getting more funding to it will be an important element in ensuring that more people get good quality care. As I said, we will move forward in the early part of the new year with a consultation on introducing some form of prescription charge to ensure that we are buying adequate and appropriate drugs to provide appropriate care for people with life-threatening illnesses.

Mr Weir: This has been a productive and sober debate. As Mark Durkan put it, this is the opportunity to help concentrate minds on the subject. It is important that, as an Assembly, we move forward on the issue. The record, particularly recently, on the actions that we have been prepared to take on cancer has been positive. As the Minister indicated, we saw that one of his earliest decisions was on the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, which was welcomed by all in this Chamber.

I join Mr Gardiner in welcoming last week's announcement about the additional fuel payments. For a lot of people who have been diagnosed with cancer, there is a need for extra heat in their home. It is important that we give that support to them so that money is not something that people have to worry about when they are left in that situation.

I thank everyone who has spoken in the debate. We have had strong, consistent support from around the Chamber. Many people covered very similar ground in their speeches. It is difficult to talk about this subject without it being very personal and harrowing. As a number of Members said, it is probably difficult to find anyone in the Chamber who does not have a family member or friend who has suffered from cancer. I was particularly moved by the contributions and personal examples from Mr Gardiner and Mr McDevitt. The debate is also an opportunity for us to try to embrace a positive way forward and to send out a positive message to those who suffer from cancer.

For a cancer sufferer or, indeed, a member of his or her family, there are, probably, three main issues that arise immediately when a doctor gives a patient his or her diagnosis. The first is the question of whether the cancer is terminal or there is any chance of recovery. One fact that we can, at least, celebrate, while, as the Minister said, not being complacent on the subject, is that, for a number of forms of cancer, including childhood leukaemia and breast cancer, what was an automatic death sentence a number of years ago is no longer that. We should celebrate that fact and try to drive the mortality rate towards a much more acceptable position. The second issue that will apply to many families and where the motion is pertinent is that, when they have been told that their relative's illness is terminal, they will want to have the maximum quality time with him or her. That is why provision of the best drugs is absolutely vital. The third is the question that every family in that position asks: whether their relative will suffer and feel great pain towards the end. Nowadays, there are drugs that, in many ways, can alleviate that situation. In my personal experience of when my father died of cancer, one issue that was very much at the forefront of my mind was whether he would suffer towards the end. The excellent support that the health service was able to give him and, indeed, many others is something positive that we should celebrate. However, we should always seek to improve.

When we say that we want to achieve the best and most efficient use of resources, it is not some accounting exercise. The best use of resources in dealing with cancer means that the maximum number of people can be helped to the maximum level. That is absolutely vital. As I mentioned, many drugs that are available can, in some cases, help to cure a particular form of cancer. In other cases, they can improve life, prolong life or reduce suffering. We should embrace all those benefits.

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

As, I believe, the proposer of the motion, Alastair Ross, mentioned, the UK has fallen behind other European countries. Trying to improve that situation should be viewed as a positive challenge and embraced. As has been indicated, a similar drugs fund has been set up in England. Certain mistakes that were made there have been highlighted. It is important that we learn from mistakes that are made elsewhere, so that we do not copy or repeat them. Consequently, the level of service that we provide, through additional funding being made available, can offer the best possible solution.

One concern that has been raised is that regional disparities have occurred in England. Hopefully, due to economies of scale in Northern Ireland, we should be able to avoid that. Northern Ireland is small enough that we can take sufficient care to ensure that nobody here is disadvantaged in that regard. There cannot be a postcode lottery in Northern Ireland. I am sure that the Minister will ensure that there is not and that everybody is given the fullest opportunity.

It has been mentioned by a number of Members, including Jim Wells and, indeed, the Minister, that dealing with cancer at the far end of the scale, with the drugs and treatments that are required, is just one part of the picture. In many ways, the most crucial element is dealing with prevention. Although much of that comes down to lifestyle choices, it is also the case, as Paula Bradley mentioned, that some cancers are genetic in nature. For some cancers, there is no apparent connection; they simply happen. From that point of view, although lifestyle choices can reduce the levels of cancer, it is clearly a terrible disease to which we must face up.

Thankfully, through breast screening and a range of other methods, we have had early detection, which is vital in providing treatment. Whatever we do today and beyond with cancer drugs, it will only be part of the solution. However, it is a vital part of the solution.

4.00 pm

There has been success in the treatment of cancer, and we all welcome that. However, if we put our hands on our hearts, we would say that the level of success was not as great as it should have been. Indeed, in the UK, the levels of fall in the rates of cancer and the increase in survival rates have not been as quick as elsewhere. That is an issue that, over a long period, we need to address.

This is a vital issue. It is also an issue on which this devolved institution can make a positive contribution through the support that is given to sufferers and their families. We can provide a positive advantage to people. Whatever funding model allows that to happen — the motion is not prescriptive — we must do so, and I welcome the Minister's

commitment to continue to press and to deliver on this issue. It is an issue on which the House can unite and send a positive message that action is being taken. That is particularly the case at this time of year when many families are left with an empty chair at the family table at Christmas. We must send out a positive message that the Assembly is united in support in providing cutting-edge drugs and in a desire to improve the situation for cancer sufferers and their families. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give consideration to the creation of a cancer drugs fund.

Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People In or Missing from Care

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Ms J McCann: I beg to move:

That this Assembly expresses deep concern at the findings of the Barnardo's report 'Not a World Away', which exposes the level of risk of sexual exploitation for children and young people in or missing from care; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that all legislation is used to protect those children who are exposed to this risk, and that the perpetrators of sexual crimes against these children and young people are brought before the courts; and further calls on all Ministers to work together to provide the support and help that these children and young people need to keep them safe from sexual predators.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment, which adds to the motion. It is important to have an all-island view of the issue.

I thank the authors of the recent 'Not a World Away' report. As Members know, it highlighted the dangers that our children and young people face in the area of sexual exploitation. Together with other research and reports, the report showed us, if we needed to be shown, the extent of the sexual exploitation of children.

There have been good initiatives in the form of legislation, action plans and strategies. Today, however, I hope that we can show where gaps still exist. We need to highlight the issue and to raise our awareness and that of the community of what it means for a child or young person to be sexually exploited. We also need to review legislation and practices. We must ensure that all Ministers and their Departments work together, at an Executive level, to put those plans into practice to provide the best protection for our children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable to this horrendous crime.

As the 'Not a world away' report and other research indicates, sexual exploitation can take many forms. The report identifies abuse through prostitution: it outlines the party house model, sexually exploitative relationships, internet exploitation and trafficking of children and young people for the purpose of exploitation. The perpetrators use all sorts of means. They manipulate and coerce young people, they intimidate and bully them, and they groom them, without any sense of care, respect or empathy for their young victims.

I am sure that most Members, like me, as a parent, really feel it when we hear the types of disturbing reports that come out. There are none more vulnerable in our society than children or young people, and we need to do all that we can to protect them. Some of the real-life stories in those reports are really vile and horrendous. We have

heard about children as young as 12 or 13 who have been groomed and then raped or sexually abused repeatedly and systematically by the perpetrators and, sometimes, they have been given drink and drugs to do it. We have to look at the long-term effects that such abuse can have on those children and young people, because those effects last well into adulthood.

The circumstances in which a child or young person finds themselves can make them even more vulnerable to sexual predators. We hear of children whose parents maybe have a history of drug or alcohol abuse, or children who are in care and have run away from home or from a care facility. We also hear of children who feel socially isolated or who have maybe dropped out of school. They are all particularly vulnerable in those circumstances.

Children who are in care — whom we are looking at specifically today — and in particular, young people who go missing from home or care, are probably one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. I know that this subject has been debated before in the Assembly, but it is important, because we need to understand that perpetrators are targeting children and young people in care homes. It is important, not simply to raise awareness of the issue in the Chamber and outside, but to do something about it.

In my view, we need a targeted approach to identify, first, the children who are most at risk, and to put those support mechanisms around them. There is also a need for them to be educated and informed about the dangers. Very often, a young person might not even see themselves as a victim because someone has manipulated or coerced them to the extent that they seem almost like a friend. Some young people do not even realise that they are being sexually exploited. It is important that we raise awareness among those children and young people.

It is also important that we show perpetrators that they will not get away with it, that their actions will not be tolerated and that they will face the full rigours of the law. Like domestic violence, rape and other sexual crime, the crime of exploitation of children and young people in or missing from care is sometimes hidden and people do not like to come out and speak about it. Furthermore, the full force of the law does not come down on perpetrators when they are exposed, charged and found guilty of such crimes.

I want to give some figures because I want to identify the young people who are in residential care. The statistics that we received show that 53.3% of young people in residential care were assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation. That amounts to over half the children and young people whom we know are in residential care. That compares with 10.7% of those who live at home, 7.8% of those who live in a kinship foster placement and 6.5% of those who are in other forms of foster care. Children and young people who are in residential care are deemed as being at significant risk.

I feel that we need to look at influences from older people. If my children are in danger of at-risk behaviour, as a parent, I can keep them in or put things in place for them. However, some people in care and in residential homes can feel very frustrated because they might not have some of the powers that they feel that they need to prevent this. So, we need to look at this issue in the round.

I ask people not just to raise awareness of this matter but to look at new ways to address it in a holistic fashion. I appreciate that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is here today, but this is not just a health issue. It is an issue for the whole Executive and for all Members in the House. I really hope that people will ask the Executive today to bring forward whatever is needed and to take on board the findings and some of the recommendations in the report and to make every effort possible to protect our children and young people from this vile crime and ensure that those who are responsible are held to account and face the full rigour of the law when they are brought to the courts and to justice.

I urge all Members to support the motion and the amendment to try to send a clear message that this will not be tolerated and that we will protect our children and vulnerable young people.

Mr Eastwood: I beg to move the following amendment: After “together” insert

“, and with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland,”.

I congratulate those who tabled the motion for bringing this very important issue before the House. The Barnardo's report referred to in the motion should be very concerning to everyone in the Assembly and it is essential that we get to grips with the issues highlighted in the report. Our amendment will, hopefully, be supported by the House, as it is essential that when attempting to tackle the issues, we recognise the need for cross-border collaboration.

The report highlights the issue of sexual exploitation as very concerning. The most frequently identified form of abuse was through prostitution. However, less obvious issues included transactional exploitation in the context of house parties and sexually exploitative relationships. Internet exploitation and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation were also identified, and the research indicates that the vast majority of identified abusers were adult males, although a significant number of female adult abusers were identified also.

Young people aged 12 to 15 emerge as the age group most at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation, and it is clear from the research that children in care were observed to be at much greater risk than those outside the care system. Young people in residential care experienced significantly higher rates of risk than those in kinship or non-familial foster care placements. It is important to say that although young people outside the care system have been identified as being at significant risk, less knowledge of their activities means that the degree of risk is likely to be underestimated.

Until recently, sexual exploitation of children and young people has been the secret shame of Ireland. In recent years, we, as a society, North and South, have struggled to come to terms with the dreadful ramifications of a past littered with the trauma of sexual exploitation and abuse. The state, Churches, civic society and individual communities now have to come together to play a role in the support of our victims and survivors. As the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, stated in response to the Cloyne report:

“For too long Ireland has neglected its children”.

That is the rationale for our amendment. Ireland is united in that shame, and any attempts to heal the mistakes of the past and to remove the crimes of the present should be made on a cross-border basis.

The six recommendations suggested in the Barnardo's report offer an initial basis by which to move forward. The establishment of the Safeguarding Board should play a crucial role in the protection of our children in the future. It is also crucial that a joined-up approach is shown in tackling exploitation issues. As the recommendations in the report demonstrate, policing, public health and care institutions all have a role to play in ensuring the safest possible environment for our children and young people.

4.15 pm

Miss M McIlveen: I support the motion and the amendment. The matter has been of great concern to me for a number of years. I was honoured to speak at the launch of the report to which the motion refers. I have raised the issue of children missing from care and home in the Assembly on a number of occasions. The risks that those young people face can be particularly shocking and concerning. To ensure a greater awareness of the issue, I have worked with a range of organisations, both voluntary and statutory, and, indeed, with individuals who have sought to protect children and young people who are at risk. Therefore, I welcome the motion.

I also think that it is fitting that we take a moment to remember the tragic death in June last year of Darlene Bell in my constituency after she left the children's home that she was living in. We do not forget individual young people or their families. In moving the motion, Jennifer McCann highlighted the real-life stories that are detailed in the report and the long-term impact that some of those disturbing incidents have had on those who have been targeted. It is important to realise that those young people are vulnerable and are targeted and manipulated.

In the previous mandate, my level of concern about the matter was such that I sponsored a number of motions on it and I undertook a significant piece of work in proposing a private Member's Bill on children who go missing from care and home. The Bill sought to place a statutory duty on government to keep detailed records of children who go missing and to produce an action plan and strategy to address their needs. It also sought to create a multi-agency approach and response. Although the Bill did not, ultimately, become legislation, a number of significant outcomes resulted from it. The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board produced a draft action plan for children who go missing and specifically referenced the risks from sexual exploitation. That was a significant step forward.

The action plan highlights the importance of a co-ordinated, multi-agency response to dealing with the issue. Specifically, it commits to collating existing baseline information, implementing revised untoward incident-reporting mechanisms between the HSC trusts and the HSC Board, and synchronising data collation between the HSC Board and the PSNI. It also commits to improving strategic oversight of the issue of missing children, completing revision of the missing children guidance, providing joint training for the PSNI and social workers, implementing the revised protocol, and establishing a safe choices working

group as a subcommittee of the regional child protection committee. Although it will take some time for us to assess how effective that action plan has been, I acknowledge the work that has taken place. I also take the opportunity to ask the Minister whether the Health and Social Care Board will provide a review of the extent to which the actions that were identified in the plan have taken place.

While undertaking consultation for the Bill, I met the PSNI missing and vulnerable persons' liaison officers on a number of occasions. Along with the staff in care homes, in my opinion, they knew more than most about the risks that those young people can face. They impressed me with their level of commitment and concern for individual young people and for the issue in general. Among those officers and those at the level of public protection units, the PSNI has demonstrated significant commitment to the safety of young people at risk and it is to be commended for that. At a more strategic level, there is a need for child protection measures that prevent child sexual exploitation to be more clearly identified, monitored and resourced in the Policing Board plan. Indeed, I ask the Minister of Justice whether he is willing to take forward a review of child protection in that plan.

In conclusion, the question must be: is there more for all the agencies that are involved to do on the issue? The answer is yes, there is much more. The need for a co-ordinated and strategic response remains crucial. The issue is about protecting some of our most vulnerable children and young people and it requires us to make it a priority. On that basis, I will continue my interest in the area. To that end, I will continue to monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the response and to work with the range of organisations, both statutory and voluntary, to bring forward proposals that can assist in ensuring that we offer greater protection to the young people at risk. I will also continue to work to ensure that adults who are guilty of abuse are brought to justice.

Mrs Overend: I, too, thank the proposers of the motion for bringing forward this important and often heart-rending issue for debate. First, I pay credit to Barnardo's for producing such a comprehensive study into the problem of abuse across Northern Ireland. The sexual exploitation of young people should be a major concern for civic organisations, statutory bodies and the wider community as a whole. It goes on hidden from view in towns, villages and cities, leaving young boys and girls traumatised and often emotionally scarred for life. It really is a despicable crime.

Until recently, sexual exploitation or child abuse — call it what you like — was recognised as a problem but its extent was unknown. Now, with the culmination of two summers of research, at last we know the extent and range of dangers faced by young people in or missing from care. It is impossible to know exactly how many young people suffer abuse in Northern Ireland. However, as the report emphatically states, no child is immune from the risk of abuse. However, children in care or those who go missing from care are often at much greater risk. Many young people in care have experienced abandonment or suffered from physical and mental abuse. The tragic irony is that although many young people who run away from care believe that they are doing so to get away from life's struggles, they sometimes run directly towards further grief.

There is no one simple answer to mitigating the risks that young people in care face when they go missing. However, it is important that it is now accepted that when a young person goes missing, it is a symptom or indicator of a problem rather than the main problem itself. Children who repeatedly go missing may be considered more streetwise and less vulnerable than those for whom it is out of character. At the end of the day, however, they are still all just children. Anyway, it is proven that children who repeatedly abscond for periods are more likely to be exploited.

Sadly, the report also identifies the failure of statutory bodies as a significant contributory risk factor for young people in care. Although I appreciate that much good work has been done over the past few years to improve standards, particularly in the health and social care trusts, there are still areas in which further progress is required. Only when everyone in a position of trust or responsibility is trained to an adequate standard will we be able to have absolute confidence that adequate protections and safeguards are in place. Only by tackling, in an organised way, the causes and consequences of children and young people going missing from care can the state ever be totally confident that it is doing what it can to protect this vulnerable demographic from abuse.

The Ulster Unionist Party also believes that an awareness-raising campaign may now be needed for all health and social care youth groups and the Youth Justice Agency, so that those who work face to face with young people daily are given information about the factors that may increase vulnerability to child sexual exploitation. They should also be trained in how to spot the signs and symptoms as they occur.

I support the motion, and although my party also supports the SDLP amendment, I query whether it is absolutely necessary. I absolutely agree that tackling an issue such as the exploitation of children should not be hindered by borders, either local or worldwide.

Mrs Cochrane: I also pay tribute to the Members who brought this issue to the Assembly. The Alliance Party supports the motion and the amendment, as there is an obvious risk that those who go missing from care will cross the border or that those who carry out abuse will use the border as a means to hide.

Child sexual exploitation is a major child protection issue for communities across the UK and Ireland. Hidden from view and unnoticed, vulnerable young girls and boys are groomed and then abused, leaving them traumatised and scarred for life. The Barnardo's report highlights some truly horrifying statistics about the extent of that exploitation and, in particular, the heightened risk to children in care.

Children who do not have a loving parent at home face a difficult start in life. Whatever the reason for the separation, children need love, protection and hope for the future. A child in care is often more likely to have come from a dysfunctional family. Therefore, it may be harder for them to know what a normal relationship is. So, when they are exploited, it is hard for them to understand that it is wrong. Furthermore, if children are constantly moved from care home to care home, they can often believe that they are being continually rejected. That can make it harder for them to make friends and can lead to insecurity.

Going missing from care is also a danger sign that a child is at risk of being exploited, and appropriate action needs to be taken to address that issue. There is a danger that if one child in care is exploited, the abuser may use that child to lure others from the same care unit to be abused.

Members referred to individual stories and statistics, and it is clear that sexual exploitation is a challenging issue to identify and address. The frequent co-existence of many other presenting issues, such as drugs, alcohol and self-harm, can often cloud identification of the risk. Young people often do not see themselves as victims and frequently fail to disclose their experiences of abuse. Furthermore, as result of their experiences, many young people can be difficult to work with and resistant to support.

If we are to stop the exploitation of children in care, all relevant Departments and agencies must work together in a joined-up approach. First, as carers are the first line of defence in the prevention of abuse, they need to be properly supported as they play a key role in early identification. Secondly, as Sandra Overend said, we must ensure that everyone who works with children can spot the signs of sexual exploitation and knows how to tackle it. That includes reporting in a joined-up manner. For example, when officials come into contact with an exploited child, it might not be obvious that abuse is happening, but if the reports from health officials, teachers, the police and those in the care system were held together, an overall picture would be seen.

Thirdly, as I mentioned — as did other Members — the report highlights the fact that young people in residential care experience significantly higher rates of sexual exploitation than their peers in kinship or non-familial foster care placements who did not present significantly greater levels of risk than young people in the general population. In addressing the issue, we must, therefore, determine whether being put in care is in the best interests of the young person or whether being placed with a relative might ensure that they have a positive role model and a better understanding that what abusers do is wrong. Research shows that children in kinship care say that they feel settled, secure and loved and that they maintain important family, cultural and community connections. Although the rest of the UK prioritises and invests in such care, Northern Ireland is still trying to come to terms with the concept.

Finally, we need to establish a national action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation. We need to challenge the criminal justice system to bring more prosecutions of this type of sex offender. Perpetrators of these crimes are becoming increasingly sophisticated, using the internet to protect their identity. We need to improve the police response to instances of exploitation, as well as offer victim support throughout criminal justice proceedings.

I support the motion and the amendment.

Ms Lewis: Speaking as a member of the Health Committee and a Member for the South Antrim constituency, I support the motion and the amendment. I thank the Members for bringing forward the motion in order to highlight the issue that is raised by the Barnardo's report, 'Not a world away'.

It is said that a society is judged by the way in which it treats those in its care, whether that is the care of people in hospital or in prison or, as in the case before us today, of children. We are judged by how we care for them all. We are

judged not just on the level of service that is provided but on the compassion that should be at the heart of our care system. To that end, it is clear that something has gone badly wrong, and it is the responsibility of us all to address the findings of the report.

The Barnardo's report, which forms the basis of the motion, found that one in nine of all 16-year-olds who took part in the study were victims of online grooming and that three quarters of those children have made face-to-face contact with the person grooming them. One in nine is one too many. It would be easy to decry the internet and those who provide the services for social networking, but the truth is that not one word that is said in the Assembly today will influence the corporate giants of Facebook, Google or Bebo. We are fooling ourselves if we believe otherwise. We must look elsewhere if we are to make a difference to the children whom we are tasked to protect and care for. What powers do we have or need and what influence can we, as an Assembly, exert to ensure that the statutory bodies answerable to us are doing all in their powers to protect our children from harm?

Most people have little or no understanding of how children end up in care. It may be through domestic circumstances or due to suffering domestic or sexual abuse in the family circle that children find themselves in care. For the most part, we believe that they are in a safe place and are receiving the best care and attention.

Hearing that they are vulnerable even when they are in care is incredibly distressing and worrying.

4.30 pm

While I commend Barnardo's for its report, I urge those with responsibility for care homes to ensure that they do all in their power to provide the highest possible levels of support for children in their care. We know that those homes cannot be prisons, but, if children are vulnerable, perhaps more can be done to protect them from the outside world and to limit access and the apparent ease with which the outside world can enter those homes.

I want to focus on one specific area of the Barnardo's report relating to the vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation. The report highlights that, of a sample of sexual exploitation cases, the highest was in the context of party houses, which accounted for 63 cases. Here we find the real heart of the matter. All elected representatives know the areas in our constituencies that are regarded as problem areas. They are usually but not exclusively in housing estates or deprived areas of the community. We know that the PSNI and the wider community are aware of the activities that take place in those houses. I am not attempting or intending to simplify the matter, but, as long as we tolerate criminal activity under the guise of house parties or antisocial behaviour, we will never fully face up to the poison that infects our community every day. I urge the PSNI to work as closely as possible with children's homes to ensure that all steps are taken to obtain the evidence needed to close down these party houses, end the suffering of those who live beside them and, most importantly, protect our children.

It is easy to hope that another report or consultation will influence future policy, but the real question is this: what can we do now? Vulnerable children cannot wait; they need action to be taken now. Society, the PSNI, elected

representatives, the courts and our communities know where the problems lie and, in many cases, who the individuals responsible are. The question is whether we have the courage, once and for all, to tackle the elements of our society who degrade us all by their actions. It is my earnest hope that we as an Assembly can unite and, with authority, protect and care for all our children, who deserve the best possible care, especially the most vulnerable, whom we must love and protect as we would our own children. I urge the Minister to do all within his power to protect our children. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and accept the amendment proposed by the SDLP. I thank Barnardo's not just for producing the report but for all the work that it has done over the years. It has been very supportive of young people, made their case and provided care and shelter for them, as have other children's organisations.

The report clearly identifies something that perhaps we turn a blind eye to, ignore or think will go away, as it does not affect us. Some of it is new to us. However, as the report states, there is clear evidence of the sexual exploitation of young people, both male and female, over the past years. That situation exists here in the North. The key point is that that is only the tip of the iceberg. The issue that we are dealing with has been hidden. Young people have suffered threats and have been made to live in fear to ensure that they do not talk about it and that it is not exposed.

Often, young people who unfortunately end up in care come from a broken home and situations where they are already in need and in fear. Those children go to a care home hoping for protection and support but become victims once again. The risk to young people in care homes is often increased because they are easier to exploit in that situation. That is because of the openness and affection that they show towards anyone who tries to help or support them. It has been stated that there can be no hiding place for anyone who exploits young people. Care homes should be safe places. Perhaps we need more vetting of those who have access to and work in care homes. They mostly do very good work, and there is no question about their expertise or suitability for the job that they do. However, some are exploiting the situation, so we need to ensure that those who work with children meet all the standards required. It is clear that some of them have been involved in grooming young people and making them available to those outside who would exploit them. We need to ensure that young people have the care that they require.

I am glad to see today that we have cross-party support for the motion. It is something on which we should all be united to make sure that we do not have anyone who sees it in some other way. We should cherish all the children of the nation equally. We need to look at how we can develop that and make sure that it will happen. The multiagency approach that Michelle McIlveen spoke about is something that we have to consider, not just along the lines of the care homes or exploitation but in relation to antisocial behaviour and all the issues that we deal with in which young people are involved. We need to have a multiagency approach to ensure that every agency lives up to the standards that have been set down for it and that there is a joined-up structure to ensure that young people are protected in every way possible.

It is not just a health issue, although it is good to see the Health Minister here. It is important that all other Departments see their role in it and that there is a multiagency approach. Maybe it is already there, but, if it is not, I encourage the Health Minister to bring together the agencies and Departments that can come together on the issue to ensure that we have a joined-up approach to make sure that it ends and there is no further increase in the risk of sexual exploitation. That requires further investigation and activities, but a multiagency approach is the way forward. Thankfully, today in the House, all parties are coming together to say that it must end.

Mr Wells: First, I apologise for not having been here at the start of the debate. This Building is awash with interest in a certain report on health that is being published tomorrow, and everyone is running around getting their press release sharpened and getting ready to react to what will be a fundamentally important document. Therefore, I will therefore be quite brief in my comments on the motion, which, of course, everyone supports.

The building blocks of society in Northern Ireland are collapsing rapidly from the days of children being reared and nurtured at home with loving parents — a husband and wife together — bringing them up. Those institutions are dwindling rapidly. We are in a position in which many children, through no fault of their own, are cast aside because of the break-up of a family, abuse, alcohol abuse or many other issues. The result is that they end up in care, which, we all accept, is not the best option for children. You would think that, when young people are in care, the last place in which they would be subjected to any form of abuse would be in an institution that is meant to look after their needs. Yet, sadly, as we know, both in clerical and state-run institutions, there has been a long litany of things going on that are repugnant to many of us.

I remember that, when I was first elected to the Assembly back in 1982, we had long debates on the Kincora issue. It is sad that, 30 years later, the same issue is still featuring in public debate and is still emerging as a problem in homes for children. It is an indication of the way that society is going that we still find evidence of that happening. At that time, when Kincora was discussed, we made the point that there had to be maximum opportunities for children and young people to report allegations of child abuse, zero tolerance of it going on and the strongest possible measures taken against those who commit those evil deeds. That still has to be the message even today — that we as a society will not tolerate those who attack, interfere with and sexually abuse the most vulnerable.

I want to emphasise a point made by Judith Cochrane. In many cases, kinship care may be an option for the protection and nurturing of a vulnerable young person that does not involve any form of state residential care. I will be honest with you: I knew nothing about kinship care until I was lobbied by the Londonderrybased organisation that sponsors and promotes the concept. It was very much below the horizon, and none of us knew much about it. It alarmed me to find out that there does not seem to be any form of state or trust funding for Kinship Care Northern Ireland. It is a small body, left largely to its own devices, that struggles day to day trying to promote the concept that, instead of a child going into care, a relative — a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister — will look after and rear the child to

the best of his or her ability. All the evidence indicates that it is a very good model. However, the evidence also confirms that it is something that the Department and trusts have not concentrated on whatsoever.

I notice that there has been a flurry of written questions and statements on the issue from various Members. Pat Ramsey, for instance, has been prolific. We need to increase the profile and knowledge of what kinship care can achieve in Northern Ireland. It may offer a model to prevent the maximum number of people having to go into care in the first place. The outcomes seem very good. There has been no state funding for the kinship care organisation, nor does the social security system seem to have been able to accommodate that type of care. That needs to be addressed, because there are many parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters throughout Northern Ireland who would like to do it if they were given a bit of support. Perhaps placing a much greater emphasis on kinship care as a model for the way forward will be something to come out of this debate.

Mr McCallister: The whole House is agreed that few crimes are more repulsive than those that we are debating this afternoon. It is truly sickening. It is also frightening that, as the aptly named report 'Not a World Away' points out, it happens in towns and villages. If we looked at the issue in more depth, we would probably be absolutely shocked to learn of the areas where it continues to happen to this day. I support the motion absolutely, and I commend those who tabled it on bringing the subject forward for debate. It is good to see the House totally united on the issue. Our only query is with the SDLP amendment. As I am sure the Minister will mention in his response, it is such an important issue that we want the Minister, his Department and the Executive to co-operate with anyone necessary to get results in tackling this dreadful crime.

I support the comments of many who have spoken in the debate. I also pay tribute to Michelle McIlveen, who has a long-standing interest in moving forward on the protection of children who are in the care system or who were in the care system but go missing and fall out of it, which is of huge concern to us all. I commend Michelle for the work in which she has been involved over the past number of years.

We need a co-ordinated strategy to deal with the issue, and we need to keep up the pressure. As Mr Wells said, the statistics that are piling up are frightening. The length of time that we have been debating the issue is also frightening. It has become much more prominent in newspaper headlines in the past 20 or 30 years. It would not have been even talked about a few years before that, never mind debated here. It is good that the issue is well up the political agenda and being addressed; that is to be welcomed by us all. It is vital that we get a co-ordinated approach and all the agencies work together, whether they are under the control of the Minister of Health, the Department of Justice, OFMDFM, any other part of government or the new Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. As Mrs Cochrane mentioned, some of those reports should be kept together to make sure that people who need to have access to them have that access so that no child falls between the stools on that one. It is simply too important, and the consequences of getting it wrong are so serious.

4.45 pm

I will be interested to hear, in the Minister's response to the debate, how he plans to tease out some of the ideas that Mr Wells talked about. Colleagues from the Health Committee will know that there has been early preparation for the forthcoming Adoption Bill that the Minister hopes to introduce on the issue of kinship care. I hope that, as work progresses, it can be included in the Adoption Bill and we can tease out the issues on support through the welfare and benefits system. It would be good to get such issues sorted. It is also important to speed up the process. We need to make sure that we have a better system, so that as few children as possible go into the care system. It is absolutely right and proper that the children who go into our care system are protected. I support the motion as amended.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have listened with considerable interest, and I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate and the issues that have been raised.

I will come back to specific points raised, if time permits. However, I want first to register my thanks to Barnardo's for undertaking the research that led to the publication of the report entitled 'Not a World Away'. My Department funded the research over a two-year period, which started in June 2009, and the project involved all five health and social care trusts. I was involved in its launch in this Building just a few weeks ago.

My Department has lead responsibility through legislation for identifying children in need, including those in need of protection, and for responding appropriately to those needs. On occasion, some of those children have to be removed from their birth family into the care of the state, and my Department is responsible for policy and legislation development in connection with children who are looked after. It is for that reason that I am responding to the motion. However, it is not an issue for me alone. The Minister of Justice has responsibility for ensuring that those who offend against children and young people, including those who sexually exploit them, are held to account for their actions by being brought before the courts, and that is acknowledged in the motion.

The motion also acknowledges that keeping children safe from abuse is not and cannot be the responsibility of a single Department or agency. The Minister of Education must ensure that children are kept safe in the school environment and facilitate the use of the school curriculum to educate children on how best to keep themselves safe and free from the risk of harm. The Minister for Employment and Learning must be assured that measures are in place to keep young people safe in further education settings. Children partake in sport and arts pursuits in huge numbers, and their safety in those settings is a matter for the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Indeed, the cross-border issue has been raised, and, under the auspices of the NSMC, an interjurisdictional protocol has been developed for the transfer of children's care between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The aim of developing that protocol is to consolidate already existing good practice and co-operation between jurisdictions. The protocol is one of a number of initiatives brought forward to strengthen the protection of children in border areas.

When it comes to keeping children safe from harm, my Department can show that it has brought forward and is bringing forward initiatives to deliver on that aim. We are in the midst of establishing a vetting and barring scheme that is about preventing unsuitable people obtaining work or volunteering opportunities with children. We want to improve the way in which agencies work together to safeguard children and promote their welfare. Work on the revision of government safeguarding policy is under way, and it is intended that a draft policy for consultation will be issued next year. That policy will establish the framework within which activity to safeguard children is conducted for the rest of this decade.

I have also given my full commitment to work with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the course of establishing and conducting a historical institutional child abuse inquiry in Northern Ireland. I can assure Members that I will not seek to hold anything whatsoever back from that. I will deal with whatever needs to be dealt with in a very open and transparent way.

For children who are on the edge of or are in state care, some of whom are in institutional care, we brought forward the Care Matters strategy. The aim of the strategy is to improve outcomes for children in or on the edge of care by increasing preventative services and supports to enable vulnerable families to stay together; by improving the range and quality of placement options; by ensuring that the health and social care trusts act as effective corporate parents and have robust arrangements in place to enable them to do so; by providing children in care with opportunities to take part in activities outside school and enabling them to come out of school with improved results; and, importantly, by strengthening support to young people as they move out of care into adult life. Barnardo's Safe Choices service, which was involved in undertaking the research that led to the publication of the 'Not a World Away' report, is a development arising out of the Care Matters strategy. The work that the service undertakes not only with young people but with staff responsible for their care, both through training and consultancy, is to be highly commended.

That brings me back to the substance of the debate and the points raised by Members. In relation to residential care risks, which Jennifer McCann raised, social services work tirelessly to help some of the most vulnerable young people in our society. In residential care homes, every possible effort is made to protect children from harm. Social workers employ a range of skills to engage with young people in their care, to build trusting relationships and to divert them away from negative or risky behaviour. Children's homes are designed as homes in which young people cannot or should not be locked away, and the vast majority of young people in residential care respond very well to the boundaries set by social workers. However, when there is sufficient concern about a young person's behaviour or the risks that he or she may be exposed to, social services will use the provision of the Children Order 1995 to place him or her temporarily in secure accommodation. If an application is granted by a court, work will be undertaken to enhance further the protections around a child.

Michelle McIlveen, who has had a specific interest in the subject and has worked very hard on it, raised the issue of the strategic action plan and how it is being developed by the Health and Social Care Board. Progress on that plan

has been good. Information is being collected on missing children in the corporate parenting report. Further revisions to the data collection are being introduced to refine data collection better. Under the untoward event mechanism, individual cases of children going missing for more than 24 hours are reported to a single point at the Health and Social Care Board for follow-up as required, and work is continuing with the PSNI to ensure that data is collected consistently and shared appropriately. A further revision of the joint protocol between the police and social services is due in January 2012, and joint training will take place alongside the relaunch of the revised protocol, which includes a section on sexual exploitation.

John McCallister also mentioned the strategy, and we are taking a strong strategic approach to protecting children. As indicated, the strategic approach involves bringing forward a range of initiatives. For example, we are looking at new vetting and barring arrangements and new child protection guidance, and, when necessary, we work with other jurisdictions to prevent the use of borders by individuals to exploit or to harm children.

Mr Molloy raised the issue of exploitation involving staff. I have to say that we do not have evidence to indicate that children are being groomed by staff. All staff in residential childcare are properly vetted and act at all times in the interests of the young people in their care. If there are any indications or evidence whatsoever, those should be brought to our attention, and we should act on them straight away in a clear and consistent way.

The Barnardo's Safe Choices service has assisted us greatly. Dealing with the problem of children going missing from care and creating a home from home is of significant benefit. I am deeply concerned about children going missing from care, regardless of how long they are missing. I am even more concerned that some are exploited by others when they go missing. That has to be tackled in a number of ways. First, we need to make places of public care more like home — the kind of home that we want to provide for our own children. We have been trying in a number of ways to create a more home-like environment. Since 2008, for example, we have introduced therapeutic approaches to all our children's homes in Northern Ireland. The evidence is beginning to show that those approaches are having beneficial effects and helping to strengthen and build more constructive and trusting relationships between the staff and young people in care. Although we recognise the considerable efforts of staff in children's homes, children's outcomes are, generally, better in foster care. Although the cases in children's homes are, generally, more difficult, we should ensure that more young people have an opportunity to be cared for in the family environment that a foster home or, indeed, kinship care can provide.

Mr Wells raised the issue of kinship care. We are looking at a range of issues relating to that and are in the process of developing kinship care standards, which will be published early in 2012. I agree that we need to develop our understanding of kinship care and the benefits that it can bring, but there are some things that we need to be careful about. Nonetheless, we can see the significant benefits.

Children living in children's homes or foster care homes should not want to go missing. One of the key lessons from the Barnardo's report is that creating a sense of home does

not often require too much from us, as demonstrated in the remarks of some of the children who took part in the study. Often, it is about what we do to keep young people occupied, interested and give them a sense of personal worth. A key question for me is why some homes are more successful at that than others, and that will be further explored in the course of action planning in response to the findings of the report.

Secondly, on the basis of what has been reported, I am of the view that there is work to be undertaken on the extent to which we can empower and suitably equip staff working in children's homes. Members should remember that many children who enter residential care do so at a later age. Some have had a very difficult life prior to entering the care system and have deep-rooted problems. Unfortunately, some will already have been the victims of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. Indeed, that may be the reason for their coming into care. Working with those children can be challenging, and it requires a high level of skill and expertise on the part of the staff responsible for their care. Very often, those children have been through the mill, and, unfortunately, the mill can leave a lasting mark. The way in which we present their particular problems in public needs to be carefully handled by all of us to ensure that they are not further exploited or, worse, demonised in the public consciousness. In particular, we need to ensure that those working with those children have the necessary training and support mechanisms to enable them to deal appropriately with the difficult situations that they face daily, including when children in their care go missing.

Thirdly, we need to equip children to keep themselves safe and minimise their exposure to risk. I know that the focus of the Barnardo's research was on young people known to social services, including looked-after children. However, it seems that sexual exploitation is potentially a problem that extends beyond children and young people in whose lives social services are already involved. That is what the Young Life and Times survey undertaken in the course of the research suggested. It also pointed to the need for a universal response that targets certain groups of children when required. I have already said that schools can make a positive contribution. The Public Health other safeguarding and protection developments Agency is also well placed to engage in raising with which it has synergy. awareness of the risks of sexual exploitation among children and young people. For that reason, I welcome the report's recommendation directed at the Public Health Agency. Better outcomes in all areas of the lives of looked-after children will contribute to keeping them safe now and in the future. It is for that reason that we look earnestly at how we can improve their educational outcomes, for example. Real safety and stability will stem from that.

5.00 pm

Fourthly, the public need to be aware of the signs that children are being exposed to the risk of sexual exploitation or are being sexually exploited by others. When we live in a world where adults freely and in public places turn a blind eye to actions likely to lead to the exploitation of a young person, there is something wrong. Consequently, I welcome the report's recommendation to develop an awareness campaign, which should begin the process of changing individual and societal attitudes and behaviours.

I would like to highlight some of the measures already in place. In September 2010, a 24/7 untoward incident reporting mechanism was put in place that now requires health and social care trusts to report to the Health and Social Care Board cases involving children who are missing for more than 24 hours. In April 2011, in conjunction with the PSNI, my Department published guidance designed to support an effective collaborative safeguarding response by the police and social services in circumstances where children in care go missing from either residential or family settings. Since February 2011, the Health and Social Care Board has had a strategic action plan in place that deals specifically with children missing from home or care.

The Barnardo's report, 'Not a World Away', makes six recommendations. One of those is directed towards the Policing Board, and I cannot comment on that. However, the other five are directed at my Department, the Public Health Agency and the Safeguarding Board. I understand that all the recommendations have been accepted and are either being acted on or consideration is being given to how they will be taken forward. The publication of the Barnardo's report is timely in the context of other safeguarding and protection developments with which it has synergy.

Sexual exploitation is a complex and frequently veiled issue that is difficult to address. It needs a multiagency, multifaceted approach. We all have a duty to ensure that all our children receive the greatest protection possible.

Mr Durkan: I thank those who tabled the motion, and I thank all parties for their pledge to support the amendment, which I believe strengthens the motion and is necessary, given the transient nature of the perpetrators and the proven transience of victims of sexual exploitation across our border with the Republic of Ireland. There have also been historical issues around the sharing of soft and hard information between the British Government, the Government here and the Government in the Republic of Ireland.

Having read the Barnardo's report, I cannot express my disgust at the realities faced by many children in and missing from care. As a parent, I am particularly distressed at the scarily high number of cases of exploitation that young people face. I very much welcome the motion, and the SDLP wholeheartedly gives its support to protecting those vulnerable children and young people and to bringing the perpetrators of sexual crimes to justice.

There is a vital need for an awareness campaign to reduce the stigma associated with abuse, and that is where the Public Health Agency and the Department of Education could be used. The Barnardo's report clearly identifies how children feel ashamed or in the wrong by reporting abuse. Educating children is key to tackling sexual exploitation. As the report demonstrates, children in care are more inherently vulnerable and may come from backgrounds where sexual abuse is the norm. Therefore, we have a duty of care to instil in those young people and in all our young people the values of what is right and wrong and what is acceptable and unacceptable. We must empower our young people so that they feel comfortable seeking help and counsel. It is not enough to legislate. We must ensure that the mechanisms are there for our legislation to work. In order to protect children in or missing from care, we have to ensure that they have easy and confidential access to counsel and assistance.

Having read the recent action plan on tackling child sexual exploitation in England, I was encouraged to see a commitment to interagency training, which many Members have mentioned today, and services to support young people. We need to apply that directly to our care system. If we were to adopt that approach, we would ensure that young people have the best services to deal with drug and alcohol abuse, which is often used by sexual perpetrators to lure young people. Furthermore, it makes the young person more vulnerable and in even less control. The action plan would involve training front line staff, including care workers, care home staff, the PSNI and healthcare professional bodies, in how to recognise the telltale signs of an abused child. I take on board the amount of work that is being done already by all those workers and their commitment to that cause.

We must tackle the serious issue of abuse today. To do that, we must ensure that there are regular assessments of care homes and procedures and that the safeguards that we have put in place through legislation are implemented and adhered to. I accept the Minister's assurance that everything that can be done in that regard is being done. I am glad that the Minister has come here today. He is not the only Minister with responsibility in this field, but I am heartened by his presence, particularly given the imminent report that was mentioned by Mr Wells. I have not quite mastered the art of sharpening press releases without having seen the report, so perhaps there is something that he might want to share with us.

We need to crack down hard on perpetrators, and we need to proactively seek them out through multiagency work, care workers, the PSNI and even children and young people themselves. The Department of Justice has a huge role to play in that regard. There is a need to reform the court system to ensure that, when we attempt to bring perpetrators to justice, the justice system does not —

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

Mr Durkan: — further stress the child or harm their health. As my colleague Mr Eastwood said, this should not be about just preventing repeats of the atrocities that have plagued our society for so long, we have to support the victims of those atrocities.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank everybody who took part in this important debate. I particularly thank my colleague Ms McCann for proposing the motion. It is a very important motion for not only the House but society as a whole. As most Members who spoke said, children are the most vulnerable sector of our society. Therefore, we have every reason to protect them from sexual predators.

Jennifer welcomed the report, and most Members did likewise. I welcome the Minister to the House. I thank his Department for funding the very important piece of work by Barnardo's. Michelle McIlveen said that she had great concerns. She has done a lot of work. When I was reading about the issue over the weekend, I was surprised by the statistics and the vulnerability of young people in care homes. We always thought that, when people went in to care homes, they were going to be looked after. For a large percentage of them to have been targeted and sexually exploited is very concerning.

There is also the issue of missing children. It is one of the big gaps that have not been closed. They are particularly vulnerable, but I listened with interest when the Minister said that new procedures have been put in place and that the PSNI will do more work in that regard.

One of the big issues that most of the Members who spoke today mentioned was the multiagency approach that is needed. I agree that most Departments have a role to play, but particularly the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice needs an action plan to pursue those who target children who go missing from homes.

Some Members mentioned the need for awareness raising. It is important that there is awareness raising not only among all those who work with children but among children themselves, because they need to be able to identify when they are being targeted. Young people are sometimes targeted in a very subtle way by those who are probably masters at grooming, so it is important that young people are aware of when such an approach is being made.

The Minister said that social services are playing a positive role, and I thank him for the work that has been done on the issue in the past couple of years. However, as Ms McCann said, we are talking about the gaps that need to be closed.

A number of Members mentioned kinship, which is not a new concept. Most of us will remember that, long ago when something happened, parents would, if they had a large family, farm their children out to uncles and aunts.

Mr Wells: I accept that what the Member says is correct. In fact, I am very much aware of kinship care in rural areas. Does he accept, however, that that arrangement has been informal and there has been no attempt to co-ordinate support for carers in that situation? Indeed, to a large extent, they have been totally hidden from public view, and, as far as I can see, not a penny has been spent on supporting and encouraging kinship care. Here we are many years after the problem was first raised, yet neither the state nor the trust has put a £5 note towards the excellent work that those people do.

Mr Lynch: I thank the Member for his intervention. I totally agree: the approach has been informal. Families arrange it between themselves and no money changes hands, but, more often than not, it works. However, there are probably hidden parts of it where we do not know what happened. Nevertheless, I agree with the Member. I know that the Minister also mentioned the concept of kinship and the fact that they are trying to develop it into something more formal for today's circumstances.

Vetting is very important in addressing the issue. As chairman of a board of governors, I know that vetting has been tightened over recent years as a result of some awful cases. However, we need to keep a focus on it.

Like other Members, I believe that the PSNI has a role to play, particularly in dealing with missing children cases. The police need to be made aware that a child has gone missing within 24 hours of their leaving a home.

I welcome the fact that the Minister will be working with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on

upcoming historical inquiries, where many of these issues will come to the fore.

I commend the motion and the amendment to all parties in the House.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses deep concern at the findings of the Barnardo's report 'Not a World Away', which exposes the level of risk of sexual exploitation for children and young people in or missing from care; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that all legislation is used to protect those children who are exposed to this risk, and that the perpetrators of sexual crimes against these children and young people are brought before the courts; and further calls on all Ministers to work together, and with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, to provide the support and help that these children and young people need to keep them safe from sexual predators.

Adjourned at 5.15 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 December 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are about to hear a statement on what has been billed as the most important reform of the health service for maybe a generation or more. It is anticipated that Members then engage in discussion about that, yet Members received this 150-page document in their pigeonhole at only 9.55 am today. How can the House have an intelligent and informed discussion about these important matters given the paucity of notice and the lack of opportunity even to read the full report before we get to the point of engaging with it?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I am sure that the Minister will explain the position when he gets up to deliver his statement and explain to the House the lateness of the document. Let us move on.

Ministerial Statement

Health and Social Care

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I will deal with that point: it is because I have respect for the House that the House hears the report first as opposed to someone getting it and leaking it to the media or the press. I am responsible to this House first and foremost, and that will always be the case.

I wish to make a statement to the Assembly on the very important matter of the review of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. Health and social care touches us all in one way or another. Every family in the Province interfaces with the sector. I know that this report has been anxiously awaited by many.

I believe that this is the most important statement that I have made or am likely to make to the House in respect of our health and social care system. It is of relevance to every man, woman and child, and it is something in relation to which we as Members of the Executive and the Assembly are duty-bound to act collectively and responsibly to ensure that we do the best we can with the resources available to us to provide safe and effective health and social care services for all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

The report, which has been distributed to Members today, contains compelling proposals for the future of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. At the outset, I thank John Compton for leading the work, the independent panel members for their challenging and thoughtful contributions, the support team, which has worked so hard to produce the report to a very demanding timetable, and everyone who contributed comment or input through meetings, discussions and correspondence.

In setting my vision for the future of health and social care services in Northern Ireland, my overriding concern is to drive up the quality of care for clients and patients, improve outcomes and make sure that patients and clients of our services have the best possible experience in every aspect of their care. A key aspect of that, of course, is promoting prevention and early intervention measures, with the overarching objective of avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions in the first place.

I recognise fully the need for greater productivity from the resources available to us, particularly in these times of austerity. It is in that context that I firmly believe that the greater involvement of front-line professionals in decision making and service development is essential.

Again, I have expressed from the outset my belief that local commissioning has a crucial and powerful role to play in driving change and innovation. I want to see a shift in care currently carried out in hospitals into the community, with patients being treated in the right place, at the right time, by the right people.

My priorities have also been clear: we need to improve and protect health and well-being and reduce inequalities through a focus on prevention and earlier intervention. I welcome the commitment that has been given to improving public health in the Executive's draft Programme for Government.

We need to improve services and outcomes for patients, clients and carers. We need to be responsive to the modern world and develop more innovative, accessible and responsive services, promoting choice and making more services available in the community. We need to involve individuals, communities and the independent sector in the design, delivery and evaluation of health and social care services through strengthened local commissioning. We need to improve productivity by ensuring the effective and efficient allocation and utilisation of all available resources, in line with priorities. We also need to ensure that, across all our services, the system looks after the most vulnerable in our society and the children, who are the future of this country. To effect that, we need to stop doing things that do not work, challenge out-of-date practices and acknowledge that some of our services and their design are no longer fit for purpose. The voluntary and community sector also has a very important role to play in providing services and improved service delivery, and we need to do all we can to remove barriers and blockages that may hinder the optimisation of that contribution.

It was in the context of that vision and the need to secure safe and effective services for all parts of Northern Ireland that I initiated a review of health and social care services. The purpose of the review was to examine the future provision of services, including our acute hospital configuration, the development of primary healthcare services and social care and the interface between sectors. There were very real concerns that our system was not sustainable to continue to meet the priorities, with consequences for patient care and safety.

My intention was to set a new reform agenda to give a stronger momentum for progress towards my vision and priorities for health and social care services for Northern Ireland. If the need for change was not clear to some before the review, they should read the review report, which paints a compelling picture of the need to reform. It makes it clear, on the basis of evidence and analysis, that the full range of health and social care services is unsustainable in its present form if we want to deliver the best outcomes for everyone and maintain the highest levels of quality and safety in service provision. In that respect, nothing has changed since I initiated this review; if anything, the need for change is even starker and more critical.

The evidence in the report is clear. As in other parts of the Western World, we face a combination of demographic change, with a growing and ageing population; increased demand and overreliance on hospital beds; advances in medicines and technology; and rising public expectations. The projected demographic changes alone are striking.

Northern Ireland has a population of 1.8 million people. It is the fastest-growing population in the UK and continues to grow. By 2020, the number of people over 75 years of age will have increased by 40%. The population of 85-year-olds is expected to increase by almost 20% by 2014 and by 58% by 2020. The system cannot stand alone in the face of such change, particularly in the context of a difficult financial and economic climate. The review is not and cannot be about cost-cutting: it is about quality, accessibility and the safety of patient care. However, as the financial situation tightens, as is, obviously, the case for all public services, there needs to be a radical shift in where and how money is used. I will say more on that shortly.

In my statement to the House on 27 September 2011, I said that I believed that the Assembly was committed to the three key principles of the NHS model of universal care, namely that it is generally free at the point of delivery; is funded by taxation; and promises that the best available cost-effective treatments and services will be provided. I believe we can continue to deliver on those principles only if those who maintain the health service as we know it support a radical programme of service change and reconfiguration and act strongly and corporately in the interests of all of the people whom we serve, even if that means taking some difficult decisions. I initiated the review knowing that there would be difficult decisions to take in the context in which we all operate. However, I made it clear when I took the health portfolio that I would not shy away from difficult decisions where it meant that a better service would be provided to the people of Northern Ireland. Indeed, it would be irresponsible of me not to do so in light of the very real issues that face the health service and the increasingly difficult economic context.

The proposals in the review team's report, 'Transforming Your Care', represent a radical change to the way that health and social care services are currently delivered. That change is long overdue. I believe that it will be good and will provide a more citizen-focused, sustainable and effective health service. The evidence that the review team has collected thoroughly speaks for itself. The vast majority of people feel that improvements are necessary.

The review team has developed proposals on the shape of a future model for integrated health and social care. I believe that those proposals, which I will outline, provide the best model to allow us to continue to deliver on the core values of our health service. On developing that model, the review team considered and assessed existing arrangements for the delivery of health and social care services here and looked at alternative models of delivery. It assessed those in the context of specific requirements in Northern Ireland. In line with my expressed wishes, the review team undertook an extensive programme of engagement with key stakeholders and the public, to which more than 3,000 people contributed. On the basis of that assessment and taking account of the views of stakeholders, the review team concluded that there was an unassailable case for change. I agree with that conclusion.

I believe that the model that has been developed by the review team and endorsed by the independent expert panel that I appointed to support the review is a sustainable model that will deliver a different, improved, citizen-focused and safe service for us all. The review has identified existing opportunities to do things better. We have an advantage over

other parts of the UK in already having an integrated system of health and social care. The review's recommendations exploit that advantage to develop a new model of integrated health and social care for the future.

The proposed future model puts the individual at the centre and not the institution. It supports individuals in caring for themselves and making good health choices. For many people, health and social care services will be increasingly accessible in their local area. Although that may not seem different, it is the way in which health professionals work together to deliver those services that will be different. They will work together in a much more integrated way to plan and deliver consistently high-quality care for patients.

It is proposed that integrated care partnerships will be set up to join together the full range of health and social care services in their area. Patients will have to deal with fewer professionals and will be at the centre of decision making about their treatment. There will be a significant shift from the provision of services in hospitals to provision in the community, in GP surgeries and closer to home where it is safe and effective to do so. Service providers will regard home as the hub and will be enabled to ensure that people can be cared for at home, including at the end of life. More support will also be available at home. Where specialist hospital care is required, it will be available, and patients will be discharged into the care of local services as soon as their health and care needs permit. The review proposes that an urgent care model will be implemented in every area to provide 24/7 access to urgent care services.

10.45 am

One aspect of the review in which, I know, there will be significant interest is current hospital provision and its future role. In line with the basic objectives of the review, it is proposed that hospitals will work as a system, with each facility contributing to the provision of total services to its population. The approach to specifying a function for each hospital will be a bottom-up approach designed by local populations and professional practitioners within the parameters set by the review. The review team has commented that all current hospitals will play an integral role in the delivery of services to their locality. They will be essential to contributing to what a local population requires from a hospital service. That will mean changes in all sites over a five-year period, with the final functionality based on population need and the principles set out in the report. Engagement at a local level with local commissioning groups will inform the services provided in each area. A key aspect of that approach is that clinical staff will be employed to work in a hospital system. They will be a resource for each population, working as necessary across hospital services and facilities.

We have 10 acute hospitals in Northern Ireland serving a population of 1.8 million. That contrasts with other areas of the UK with similar-sized populations; for example, urban areas of Great Britain that are supported by maybe fewer than half that number. Our aim must be to provide resilient, sustainable and safe services. We need to have a focus on individuals, patient care and safety and not on buildings or institutions. We should not ask the public to accept services if we cannot provide assurance that they are safe, resilient and sustainable. It is in that strategic context that the review envisages that, by 2016-17, the model of major acute

hospitals for Northern Ireland's more dispersed population would reconfigure to a more appropriate scale. Clearly, that will mean changes at sites, but the key test for any future configuration must be sustainability and resilience in clinical terms.

The review recommends that each local commissioning group should draw up proposals and take account of the potential to provide services to the Republic of Ireland on the basis of the analyses in its report. The review concludes that it is only likely to be possible to provide resilient and sustainable acute services on between five and seven sites. That may prove to be the case — I cannot say at this stage — but the test will be one of clinical sustainability, resilience and patient safety. On that basis, we will be able to determine whether an acute hospital will be viable. That test is simply not optional in this new model of services, and, in my view, it should never have been optional.

I understand that, during the engagement on the review with stakeholders, concerns were often raised about the future provision of services for older people. Older people are significant users of health and social care services, and almost one fifth of the budget is allocated to services for them. Our services need to adapt to our ageing population to ensure that we can provide an appropriate level of services into the future. It is not surprising, therefore, that a significant section of the report is devoted to improving services for older people and for those with long-term conditions. The report highlights that home should be the hub of care for older people, with more services provided at home and in the community. The review makes recommendations to encourage independence and to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, including the provision of a diverse choice of provision to meet the needs of older people and appropriate regulation and safeguarding to ensure quality and to protect the vulnerable.

The review contains a wide-ranging set of proposals across secondary, primary and community care. As well as examining acute care and services for older people, it includes proposals for improving services for those with a physical or learning disability, people using mental health services, maternity and child health, and family and child care. The proposed changes would require staff to develop different skills and capacities. Workforce planning and development is and will be a critical building block in ensuring that staff are appropriately trained and confident in their roles. Our workforce planning needs to focus on demand signals from the local health economy and patients and clients, rather than simply supply-side inputs. It needs to be linked to service planning and underpinned by robust financial plans, making it more robust and linked to patient needs.

The review recognises the scope for the greater use of technology as an enabler of the delivery of the new model of care. That resonates strongly with me, and I believe that there is considerable scope to exploit the opportunities that technology provides in the delivery of effective healthcare services. The statement that I made to the Assembly last week provided details on how we should develop Connected Health to improve patient care and to help support the economy.

As I said, the review is not about cost cutting. Nevertheless, in line with a shift of services closer to the home, it

envisages a significant shift in the allocation of funding, and it coincides with the greatest financial challenge that the service has faced in many years. The days of increasing resources, year on year, are gone. The change in the model of delivery means that there will be a shift of care from hospital settings to the community, and there will be a shift in the resources as funds are reallocated in line with service delivery. It is envisaged that key changes would include more care delivered in the home; changing care packages for people in nursing homes; an increased role for GPs; an increase in the role of pharmacy in medicines management and prevention; increased use of community and social care services to meet people's needs; and outreach of acute services into the community. Taking account of those changes, the review concludes that it is envisaged that, by 2014-15, there would be a shift of funding of around 5% or about £83 million from the hospital services budget to other services. In that model, there would be increases of around £21 million to personal and social services, around £21 million to family health services and primary care and around £41 million to community services by 2014-15. The figures provided by the review team are indicative, and, clearly, the proposed reallocations would be refined through detailed implementation planning work.

The changes will not be straightforward. They will require fundamental changes to the way in which we deliver services and will require substantial retraining of staff. It is in that context that the review recommends that transitional funding of around £25 million, £25 million and £20 million will be required in each of the next three years respectively to enable the new model of service to be implemented. The funding would help support integrated care partnerships, service changes and a voluntary early release scheme. It would be foolish of me or, indeed, any of us to believe that change of such a scale could be implemented without some cost. However, the costs identified are transitional and time-limited over three years. After that, there will be payback through more effective and efficient use of the resources that have already been allocated to our health service.

The review team has provided a wide-ranging set of proposals. In the coming weeks and months, those proposals will need to be translated into more detailed plans, setting out the specific changes to be taken forward. It will also be necessary to develop engagement plans for those changes, setting out how the changes will affect users, families and staff. The review has recommended that implementation and stakeholder engagement plans should be drawn up and published by June 2012. The plans will be based on population plans for each area, drawn up by each of the local commissioning groups with the health and social care trusts.

The proposals in the report will mean different things to different people, and that is to be expected. The proposals have been developed in the context of the evidence that was presented in the course of the review, and they provide a framework within which service reconfiguration can be taken forward. The challenge now is to ensure that we take forward the implementation of the review for the health and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. This is the responsibility of all of us. I am determined that the review report does not sit on the shelf. Although I carry the portfolio for health, I have said before and will say again that every Minister is a Minister for health. It is not nor should it be the sole responsibility of one Minister. All our

constituents look to each and every one of us to deliver safe and effective health and social care services. The next step will require leadership to be shown first by me but also by all of us, as elected Members of this Assembly, and by the health and social care sector. We need to chart, using the review as the basis, a road map for sustainable, effective and efficient provision for health and social care services into the future.

Members, I look to you today to support me in my proposals for reforming and modernising our health and social care system to ensure that we get the best from the resources available to us; to ensure that services are, where possible, brought closer to the patient's home; and to ensure that patients are treated in the right place, at the right time and by the right people.

I repeat my thanks to John Compton and his team and to the five independent expert panel members for producing this substantial piece of work in a demanding timescale. I also pay tribute to every person who gave their time to contribute to the review over the past few months. I ask Members, those in the health and social care sector and the public to read the report carefully in the coming days and weeks. Change will need to be delivered through working together. As the review has set out clearly, it cannot be put off. We have had too many reviews of health and social care over recent years where little has happened. I am determined that we should not repeat the mistakes of the past, and we need to move forward now if we are to have a sustainable future for our health and social care services. I commend the statement to the House.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the statement. We have all been very anxious to get our hands on the report, and I assure you that, like other Members, I picked mine up in the pigeonhole this morning the same as everybody else.

The Compton report will have significant implications for the future of the health system not just in the North but in the border counties. The report clearly requires significant examination and scrutiny by us, by healthcare professionals, by the trade unions and by the public in general, and we will certainly take this report away and study it carefully. On initial examination, I see that there are areas that will cause obvious concern and other recommendations that will be less controversial and will be welcomed.

Recently, a number of reports have been produced detailing the state of healthcare across the island, and, going forward, there is clearly a need for a sensible all-Ireland approach to delivering healthcare for citizens. That approach will deliver not just significant efficiencies in these difficult economic times but better outcomes for patients. At the end of the process, we need to have a healthcare system that delivers for the needs of people and communities, is safe, accessible and efficient, and targets the inequalities — I know that this is mentioned in the report — that give rise to ill health in certain sections of society. Those are the benchmarks by which we will judge the report.

I welcome the fact that more people will be supported to live at home, but could the Minister elaborate on how he intends to support their carers? We know that, whatever interface

there is with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, people are often asked to care for others around the clock at home. The word “sustainability” is in his statement quite a number of times, but will he commit to the sustainability of services along the border and work with his counterpart in Dublin to ensure that services in hospitals near the border can be made sustainable?

Mr Poots: The report makes it very clear that we want to see the home as the hub of care. Therefore, it is important to us that that care is provided at home. We recognise that, in many instances, carers can fall ill and can have problems because of the stress that is put on them. So, ensuring that respite is available for carers is important in ensuring that the health of the carer does not break down.

That is recognised in the report, and it is certainly something that we will look to deliver on.

11.00 am

I have agreed to conduct a mapping exercise of services that are available along the border. Sometimes, difficult times and difficult economic conditions enable people to make the best decisions. I suspect that, a few years ago, the Republic of Ireland would not have been that interested in acquiring services in Northern Ireland. I am quite open to the idea of the Republic of Ireland buying services in Northern Ireland, which will then enable us to sustain many of the services in our border hospitals. I do not have an issue with or a particular concern about that. I believe that that will be developed over the report's lifetime.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Jim Wells to ask a question, I remind Members that there is a keen interest on all sides of the House in the statement. That is understandable because of its nature and importance. There is a full list of Members who wish to ask questions, so I urge you to keep your questions short, especially in relation to the statement. It is also very important that the questions relate to the statement, and, if we can achieve that from Members, we might also be able to achieve short answers from the Minister. It is important to encourage all of that.

Mr Wells: I concur with the Minister that this is, perhaps, the most important report on health in a generation. Indeed, it is, perhaps, one of the most important reports that will come before the Assembly in this term. It is a pity that that has not been reflected in the turnout by Members opposite. If you take out the Health Committee members and a few others, you will see that there are very few Members here on that side. That is highly regrettable and indicates how much they care about health service provision in Northern Ireland in the future.

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

Mr Wells: The Minister is aware that there has been a series of reports on health provision in Northern Ireland. There has been the Appleby report, the Hayes report and 'Developing Better Services'. Many of those gathered dust. Can the Minister inform the Assembly why he felt it was appropriate at this time to initiate such a major review? Can he give us a guarantee that this report will not gather dust?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question, and I take your gracious rebuke, Mr Speaker, in the way that it was expressed.

The report itself sets out the reasons why it has been published and why it has been published now. One of the reasons is that the elderly population, which requires more and more services, is growing. By 2020, the number of over-75s will have grown by 40%, and the number of over-85s will have grown by 58%. Seventy-five per cent of people over the age of 75 have chronic conditions, so they need additional support. Year on year, the growth requirements in health are 4%, while our budget is 2%, so, leaving inflation to one side, there are serious challenges.

The review has been brought out not as an excuse to do nothing but as a model to get on with the task. I wanted to have the panel of experts provide their thoughts on the way forward. The report will not gather dust; it will gather momentum. It will go out for the trusts to start to implement very quickly, and we will encourage that.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the report, which has been anxiously awaited on these Benches. The Minister rightly mentioned the transitional costs, which are present when you go to change anything. He puts those at £25 million, £25 million and £20 million. Does he have the money in his budget to meet those extra costs, or will he seek money from DFP to fund that?

Mr Poots: In the first instance, I will seek money from DFP, and I hope that that will be forthcoming. If it is not, we will need to find the money in the system to ensure that this moves forward.

Mr McCarthy: The statement is very important and long-awaited. People should take time to read and digest it properly rather than rushing to immediate positions. I welcome the Minister's commitment to care in the community. The Minister will know that I have spoken loudly about the elderly and people with learning disabilities and mental health —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member put his question?

Mr McCarthy: It is essential, Mr Speaker, that funding follows care in the community. It is all right to have fine words and speeches, but, at the end of the day, older people and people who need —

Mr Speaker: I insist that the Member come to his question.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister assure the Assembly that funding will follow the most vulnerable?

Mr Poots: Perhaps less noise and more listening would help the Member. It has already been delivered in the statement that we are looking at shifting £80 million from the hospital sector to the community sector. How much clearer can we be? It is already in the statement.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for his much-needed and welcome statement. It appears that there will be a greater onus on the five local commissioning groups in delivering this agenda. What interaction has the Minister had with those groups, and does he feel that they are equipped to deal with the challenges ahead?

Mr Poots: I met the commissioning groups quite recently, and they want greater authority to move things forward. The commissioning groups were set up after the trusts and, to an extent, have had some difficulty in showing their teeth. I encourage the commissioning groups, which have a local

dimension, to show their teeth and to demonstrate the type of services that need to be acquired to meet the needs of our communities. They should not be driven simply by the demands of trusts or, indeed, hospitals.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. This question may be regarded as getting retaliation in first, but in your statement, Minister, you say of hospital sites:

“the key test for any future service configuration has to be sustainability and resilience in clinical terms.”

You also talk about local commissioning groups taking:

“account of the potential to provide services to the Republic ... on the basis of the analyses in its report.”

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

Mr Brady: Daisy Hill Hospital, which the Health Committee visited last week, ticks all the boxes for all the criteria. Will the Minister ensure that hospitals in border areas such as Daisy Hill, which ticks all the boxes, will be regarded favourably in any decision of his on the reconfiguration of sites?

Mr Poots: Key to the services provided in a hospital are the following three things: safety, sustainability and resilience. I will not support a service that does not meet all three of those aspects. That also applies to the community. Therefore, we need to be assured that the community can get to the hospital safely, sustainably and resiliently. For those who live a considerable distance from a hospital, we have to ensure that the time it takes and the services provided to them are safe, sustainable and resilient. When they get to the hospital, it also needs to be safe, sustainable and resilient.

A course of work done in Scotland, where distances are much greater, would be interesting reading for Members. You are four times as likely to have a successful outcome in a trauma situation going to the appropriate hospital as you are going to the nearest hospital. Therefore, frankly, if you have been involved in a major trauma incident, it may be safer to travel past your nearest hospital to the appropriate hospital. Members should reflect on that, because that is what the outcomes are, and we want the best outcomes for our public.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his leadership on the review. How can you assure GPs that they will not simply be lumbered with extra work for little return?

Mr Poots: My view is that GPs are critical to the delivery of our services. Some things happened in the past that perhaps undermined the work that GPs do. The out-of-hours system does not work as well as we would like, and that needs to be challenged. However, GPs will benefit. The review suggests an indicative reallocation of £21 million to FHS and primary care, which is a 3% increase on the allocation that would have been available.

We want to have more integrated teams working together in a holistic way. We want GPs to work with podiatrists to prevent falls by older people; with dieticians to deal with people with diabetes; and with physiotherapists to deal with people who have chest problems — all in a much more integrated way. When people have multiple problems, we want to have multidisciplinary teams working together in the

primary care sector and setting to avoid hospital admissions and, more importantly, to deliver considerably better outcomes for patients.

Mr McNarry: There are 207,000 registered carers in Northern Ireland, with 67 added to that number annually. As the Minister knows, they save us around £4.4 billion. In highlighting, as he has today, that the home should be the hub of care for older people and, I assume, those with learning disabilities, what protection is he offering the carer at home, today and tomorrow?

Mr Poots: Carers are absolutely critical. I dealt with that point when I responded to the Chair of the Committee. However, we are looking at how we can provide appropriate respite for carers. I want to make one thing clear: most of us will have relatives who are elderly or suffer from some form of disability. Particularly when it comes to relatives, the public — the community — have a responsibility to provide care for them. I do not expect the Government to do everything for my elderly relatives; I have a contribution to make. When I was a child, they looked after me. When they are elderly and need help, I would like to think that we will be there for them. Carers in general are not looking for something, but many of them need help, support and respect and to be part of the system. We want to ensure that carers are part of the team that makes decisions on how best to look after people. It is important that carers get appropriate respite so that they can get a break.

We are also looking at developing packages so that older people can take control of their own finances. Instead of having four 15-minute visits in a day, when someone rushes in and gets an older person up to the toilet, gets them their breakfast and goes away again, they could buy in a package that is appropriate to their needs and is done in conjunction with their family. That may involve the family as the carers who receive the finances for that package.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, you said that our constituents look to us to deliver safe and effective health and social care services. I am conscious that I have a constituent who will ask me about the report and will ask where it says that a reduction in hospital waiting times for operations will be addressed. I ask the Minister how that will be addressed.

Mr Poots: The reduction in hospital waiting times will be facilitated by changing the model. Removing people from hospitals who should not be there in the first place through better management of their condition is an important element in supporting our hospitals. Ensuring that we have hospitals that deliver elective services, care and surgery without the disturbance of emergency care is another key element of that.

Reconfiguration and reorganisation is absolutely critical to what the Member asks. Given the demands that are coming and the budget that we have, the choice is either to reorganise and restructure or to reduce. I am in the first category: I want to reorganise and restructure. That is what the report is about and what I am about. Sometimes the delivery of that will not be to everybody's liking. Sometimes it will cause some pain, but, if we get to a better destiny, that is what is important.

11.15 am

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for his critical statement. How will the average Northern Ireland citizen and taxpayer benefit from the implementation of the review?

Mr Poots: The average citizen will benefit because we currently spend £4.6 billion on health and social care. I think that it is around £2,700 or £2,800 for every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland. Given the investment that we are making in health, we need to ensure that we get the best value for money out of it. We need to ensure that the resources that we expend are not wasted. If we can avoid people with long-term conditions going to hospital and allow them to be treated in their own home and community and have better outcomes at the same time, the individual gets better care and we as a public body spend our money better. It is a win-win situation for both the patient and the general public.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. Minister, you said that there would be more co-operation and more use of GP services. Could that mean that we will see more co-operation at a local level between GPs and consultants, therefore cutting down on hospital appointments, especially in rural areas?

Mr Poots: Yes we can. We are looking at integrated partnerships for GPs. GPs will be working as part of an implementation planning exercise. The report indicates that there should be an increased share for family health services and primary care. We want the GPs working on the integrated health partnerships. We will have 17 of them across the Province. GPs will also be expected to reach a standard of quality. That is absolutely important. Often they will have to work in partnership with others to reach the expected standard of quality.

Mr Givan: I welcome the focus on the individual and the outcomes for the individual in the Minister's statement. Will he elaborate on how the integrated care partnerships will operate? In particular, what role will there be for the independent sector, and how will the patient be put at the centre of decision-making?

Mr Poots: The partnerships are an important component of the recommendations for the future model of integrated health and social care. They will join together the full range of health and social care services in each area, which includes GPs, community health and social care providers, hospital specialists and representatives from the independent and voluntary sector. They will have a role in determining the needs of local populations and planning and delivering integrated services. The review recommended that there should be 17 such partnerships. For the individual, that would mean that GPs and all other health and social care providers in the area, including the voluntary and community sector, will be able to work together to deliver the services needed by their local population. As the review of local government looks at community planning, I see that as absolutely critical in the overall delivery of the report.

Mr Lunn: I also welcome the report. There is a reference in the report and in the Minister's statement to an expanded role for community pharmacy, which is very welcome. I appreciate that the Minister may be constrained by the current judicial process, but does he agree with me that

there may be a need to revisit the decisions that have been made on community pharmacy in light of that strong recommendation?

Mr Poots: As the Member knows, the judicial review findings on the previous Minister's decisions will be announced on 21 December. In relation to community pharmacies, I do not see the key role of a pharmacist as being paid to dispense pills. I think more of our pharmacists than that. They have a skill, training and an ability to play a far more important role in the delivery of services, ensuring that people can remain in their community, assisting elderly people to remain in their home and helping us to avoid hospital admissions. I see a fundamentally changing role for pharmacists. As soon as the court case is over, I will want to get into discussions and negotiations with pharmacists on how we move forward in a way that delivers the best services to the community and is sustainable for pharmacists at the same time.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. As he will be aware, change always brings an element of fear. How does he respond to the fear in communities that the Department will impose change on them without adequate local engagement?

Mr Poots: The trusts will be responsible for the delivery of the report. Those significant things will have to be consulted on in local communities. I hear what the Member says about change causing fear, and he is correct: people are often fearful of change. However, if you read the report, you will realise that doing nothing is far more frightening. Doing nothing will bring about change, but it will be the wrong kind of change; it will be the reduction of services. We do not have the resources to simply keep doing things that are not sustainable over and over again.

I say to Members that anything in life, whether in business or anything else, that does not change over time generally shrinks, shrivels up and dies. We need a health service that is flexible and adaptable, makes the best use of modern technology and responds to the work that pharmaceutical companies are doing to provide the best medicines for people and so on. We need to be slick in our movement and our ability to adapt to meet all that. This is where we are going, and change will happen. I hope that, after the report works out, that change will be viewed as positive as opposed to negative.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I have not had a chance to read the report in any great detail. Will the Minister give us an indication of where the new women and children's regional hospital at the Royal fits into the review?

Mr Poots: It is not part of the review, but the women and children's hospital will be in the new block that is being built. As I recall, it will be opened in 2014, and work on it has been done. Credit to the previous Minister: he made the decision to move that forward. However, the biggest issue for me now where those types of facilities are concerned is identifying a funding process that can deliver a new children's hospital in Northern Ireland. The condition of the current children's hospital is an absolute disgrace, as is the fact that staff have to work in those conditions to provide complex care and treatment. It is absolutely incumbent on us to identify a way forward on that.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Minister will be aware that early years is vital to young parents and families. Will the Minister outline whether the review deals with early years?

Mr Poots: We see a clear way forward in the fact that, if we make interventions at that early point, we will get far more significant benefit. For example, for every pound spent in the early years, you will get a return of between 14% and 16% each year thereafter. Therefore, in a person's lifetime, you will get three or four times the return that you put in.

We are finding that more and more children and young people are coming to our attention — I think that the figure has grown by around 40% or 50% in the past five years — and that is evidence that our social services side is getting better at the work that it does. So, it is important that we make interventions at that early point for very vulnerable children who are being brought up in homes where there is a lack of skill. It is also important that real benefit comes from that delivery. Multidisciplinary teams and social services working in close conjunction with GPs and so forth will help to ensure that that is the case.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. What services does he intend to have carried out in a patient's home?

Mr Poots: Sorry, could you ask that again? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to repeat the question.

Mr G Robinson: I would like — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr G Robinson: What services does the Minister intend should be carried out in the patient's home?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. I await the question from the SDLP with interest, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. The Member should not point, either to the Chair or across the Floor. Allow the Minister to continue.

Mr Poots: I note that there are only five SDLP Members in the Chamber. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. That goes for all sides of the House. Allow the Minister to continue.

Mr Poots: SDLP Members have yet to ask a question, so that demonstrates their interest in health and social care.

With regard to care provided at home, we have considerable numbers of older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems for whom more services can be provided at home. We have not touched on mental health issues thus far. One of the things that is highlighted in the report in respect of mental health is that some care can be provided at home by visiting psychiatrists. It does not always work well in mental health when an appointment is made for someone to come to hospital: often they do not turn up. Therefore, there can be more effective care in this way.

As regards a future model for integrated health and social care, we see individual self-care as an important element.

Over the next six years, we will roll out a telemonitoring scheme to 20,000 homes. Last week, I visited a gentleman who had attended Antrim Area Hospital around six times each year and was admitted three times each year for about a week. Since we introduced telemonitoring, in the past year, he has not been once to Antrim hospital. Therefore, excellent monitoring of conditions and early intervention when vital signs show some distress can lead to considerably fewer hospital admissions and a cost-effective regime that delivers for the patient.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mervyn Storey, I see that some Members may have a problem. Usually, when for whatever reason a Minister has not heard a question, I have asked the Member, whatever side of the House he sits on, to repeat that question. There is nothing wrong with that. The convention is clear. Members should not point to the Chair or point across the Chamber when they have some difficulty with that. Let us move on.

Mr Storey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am glad that SDLP Members have not been tasked with reorganising the health service; they cannot reorganise how they submit questions to the House.

As the Minister knows, I serve a constituency that does not have acute hospital provision and is serviced by hospitals in other jurisdictions and constituencies. In light of the statement, what is the inevitable outcome in regard to the future provision of services, particularly at the Causeway Hospital, which serves my North Antrim constituency?

Mr Poots: Again, we go back to safety, sustainability and resilience. Decisions in the Member's constituency will be taken by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which currently operates a two-site facility. It may desire to continue to do that. If so, it must ensure that having a two-site facility is safe, sustainable and resilient. If the trust decides to move to a model of one hospital for its area, ensuring that people get to that hospital must be done in a way that is safe, sustainable and resilient. If lives are threatened by the closure of a hospital, that will also be a challenge for the trust.

Lord Morrow: I, too, thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. With this report before us, it is regrettable that the SDLP and Sinn Féin show no interest in the future of the health service.

However, as the Minister has made it clear today that he does not want the report to be left sitting on the shelf and, indeed, he is determined that it will not be, can he tell the House what is the next step in this important process?

11.30 am

Mr Poots: The report is being made public today, and people will take some time to digest it, hopefully not too much time. In the early part of the new year, trusts will look to how they will develop and action a lot of the work that is in this report. We see it being rolled out over a five-year period, so people need not be too worried that, in six months, everything will happen at once and it will be an absolute shock to the system. It has to be carried out in a way that enables things to carry on smoothly. To do that, we need to have the implementation plan in place and the clinical forum established so that we have good exchange with experts in

the field and they can play their part in ensuring that we have the best possible healthcare system in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: I want to return to the issue of acute provision. In one breath, the Minister tells us that it is a matter, for example, for the Northern Board, and, in the next, he tells us that his vision under the report is that the number of acute hospitals might fall as low as five. Assuming that one or two of those hospitals will be in Belfast, one will be in Londonderry and, presumably, one in the west, what about the rest of the Province, particularly the north of the Province? Could the Minister tell us frankly whether he believes the Causeway Hospital, which serves the upper part of north Antrim, will be an acute hospital in five years? Can he tell us frankly what his vision is in that regard?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. If he had been in court, he would have just made a fool of himself. I never said that I had a vision for five acute hospitals in Northern Ireland. No good judge would have taken that on board, and it might have been dismissed out of hand.

I cannot say what exactly the future holds for the Causeway Hospital, or, indeed, for Daisy Hill Hospital, but what I can make very clear is that the service that has to be provided is safe, sustainable and resilient. Therefore, the care that is provided has to be quality care for the people of the north of the Province. We cannot have a service that does not meet those standards because that would be a second-rate service, and I am sure that the Member would not want a second-rate service for the constituents of North Antrim or East Londonderry. I am sure that he would not want the lives of people in that area put at risk because the services were not safe, sustainable and resilient. Therefore, it is up to the trusts to ensure that that is the case, and, if it is not the case, they will have to come forward with a different proposal. At this time, they clearly believe that that is the case, and, as that continues to be the case, the trusts will continue to operate as is. If they do not believe that that is the case, we need to see what their proposals are.

Mr Speaker: I call Mark Durkan. — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the Minister's statement and the much-awaited publication of the review and my long-awaited opportunity to ask a question on it. Let me assure the House of my party's unwavering commitment to the health service and the need to improve it.

What are the implications of the review for staff and staffing numbers right across the sector, including those caring in the community? What assurances can be given to those committed and caring professionals so that their morale is not adversely impacted?

Mr Poots: My responsibility, first and foremost, is to the public. The HSC sector currently employs around 70,000 people, so we are the largest employer by a considerable margin in Northern Ireland. However, it is not my responsibility to create employment; it is my responsibility to deliver quality healthcare.

The review is not about redundancies or any of that type of stuff; it is about how we reorganise our services. Setting that to one side, there is a financial issue because the Budget that came from Westminster would not have allowed

us to extend our health funding as far as we might have liked. There are, therefore, implications on that side.

We will seek to ensure that staff are treated with respect at all times, that they are made aware of issues at an early point and that they are properly consulted. We will seek to ensure that we move forward in that way. Thus far, we have avoided compulsory redundancies. Members must remember that, around this time last year, people were saying that there would be dire consequences in the health service, that we would reach chapter 11 administration and that 4,000 people would have to be paid off. None of those things has happened. Let us not raise unnecessary concerns. We will manage these situations, and we will not be introducing a vast array of compulsory redundancies in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the report. There will be some modest and moderate changes, but this is not something to cause huge concern among our staff.

Ms Ritchie: The SDLP has always been unwavering in its support for health and social care provision, and we will not take lectures from the DUP on that.

Page 117 of the document states:

"All current hospitals will have an integral role in the delivery of services to their localities."

Will the Minister spell out what the model will be for the new local hospital at the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick? How will services for Daisy Hill Hospital be configured on a North/South basis? What discussions have taken place with the Southern health authorities in relation to that matter?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for her four questions. She did not ask any for a long time, so I suppose she may as well ask plenty when she gets to the point. With regard to the Member's parochial concerns, a new hospital was built in Downpatrick. The report states that that hospital, along with the other hospitals, has an integral role to play. It will be a matter for the South Eastern Trust, in negotiations with the HSC Board, to identify what role that hospital plays. There would not be much point in building a new facility and not using it.

The Member also asked about how we work with the South of Ireland. We have had discussions with counterparts in the South at ministerial and official level. I am very happy to work with them to provide the best possible services for people from either side of the border. If they are happy to pay for those services, we are happy to supply them.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his statement. In his statement, he indicated a greater role for local commissioning groups. What additional responsibilities does he envisage? Do they include a budgetary role?

Mr Poots: The commissioning groups have an important role to play. As I indicated to another Member, they need to have a greater role as we move forward in working with local communities to identify local needs and to translate those into the services that are provided. We need to have greater community identification of the services, the needs and what should be provided. That is where the local commissioning groups can provide that level of expertise.

Mr McDevitt: The expert group makes 99 proposals for change, but there are only two numbers in those 99

proposals. Let me ask for some leadership from the Minister this morning. Proposal 10 recommends:

"A major reduction in residential accommodation for older people, over the next five years."

By how much will that be reduced? When does the Minister expect that reduction to take place?

Proposal 73 states:

"Over time, move to a likely position of five to seven major acute hospital networks in Northern Ireland."

Which will it be? Will it be seven or five?

Proposal 84 recommends:

"Targets to reduce the level of inappropriate hospital admissions for people in the dying phase of an illness."

What targets? When will we see them?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. First, he asked about residential homes. We are making it clear that the residential home for people that we envisage in the future is their own home, not some care home, and we want to enable people to stay in their own home. I do not know anybody who wants to move out of their own home into residential care, but many people have to and are forced to. We need to provide a model that ensures that those people can stay in their own home. That will be the driver, because we will not have the requirement for those facilities.

With regard to the reduction from seven to five, the report said that that would be the likely outcome. Again, I go back to safe, sustainable and resilient. Those are the tests, and that will be the demonstration of it. We will ensure that we provide safe, sustainable and resilient services across the piece.

As regards the care of people who are at the end of life, 28% of those who are admitted to hospital from a nursing home die within 48 hours. I will repeat that: 28% of people who are admitted to hospital from a nursing home die within 48 hours. I am not sure whether the Member thinks that that is a good thing. We want our nursing homes upskilled to provide that end-of-life care. I do not think that it is dignified or appropriate for someone who is near the end of their life to be taken from the nursing home where they have been provided with care for a number of years to a hospital A&E unit to be put through the trauma of the admission process, get into a hospital bed and die within the next 36 hours. I do not think that that is a dignified way to end your life, so I want to change that. I am not sure that the Member does, but he should reconsider.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. In terms of safety, sustainability and resilience, the whole of Tyrone has been stripped of services. Omagh was stripped of A&E services by Bairbre de Brún and Magherafelt by Michael McGimpsey. The Minister placed emphasis on patient requirements and what patients should be demanding and expecting from the service. What assurances will he give to the people of those areas that the service will be improved? The Minister referred earlier to trauma instances. What assurances will he give that people in south Derry and Tyrone will not be jeopardised by the stripping of our services?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. The SDLP is a bit like the buses: none comes along, and then they all appear at one time.

I have been attempting to undo some of the damage done in Tyrone and south Londonderry with the development of a new hospital in Omagh, which I announced recently. We are very committed to ensuring that that is delivered so that the people of Omagh have a quality health system in conjunction with the new hospital in the south-west. There are opportunities for getting to a better place in mid-Ulster, and the Mid-Ulster Hospital has a role to play in that. I would be happy to engage in discussions with representatives of that constituency on how we can deliver more services locally. I recognise the difficulties that there can be in getting to places such as Draperstown and Gortin and their distance from local services.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I looked through the report briefly and saw that one of the main subjects is preventative measures. How will more people be able to avail themselves of healthy food with high nutritional value, particularly those from areas of deprivation? What are his thoughts on people being able to afford healthy food?

11.45 am

Mr Poots: My thoughts are very clear. Along a two-mile bus journey for someone who lives in Sandy Row, the Village or the Markets to Finaghy Road South and out towards Malone, life expectancy rises by nine years. That is just unacceptable. A lot of the reasons for that are individual choices. A greater number of people in those areas smoke. Each year, 2,300 people die as a result of smoking. One in every two people who smoke will die as a result of it. Other people engage in excessive and binge drinking, which does damage and causes cancers and cirrhosis of the liver. Other reasons include the eating of unhealthy foods and not eating enough fresh vegetables and so forth. All those things are major contributors.

The Public Health Agency's work will be supported. We have an obesity strategy, which will be taken forward. We will invest in that, and we will further invest in public health because prevention is better than cure. It is cost-effective to engage in prevention and ensure that fewer people come to us because they have type 2 diabetes as a result of their bad diet, chest problems as a result of smoking or a lot of chronic illnesses that are brought about by heavy and excessive drinking.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we move to the Finance Minister's statement, I thank the whole House for its co-operation this morning. All Members who wanted to ask a question were able to ask one. I also — *[Interruption.]* Order. I also thank the Minister for his co-operation this morning. Let us move on.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I appreciate your allowing me the opportunity to make a point of order. Will you check the audiovisual facilities in the House? This morning, when the Minister was speaking, he was the Minister of Finance and Personnel on the blue screens. That was a little confusing to Members.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. Allow us to check and come back to the Member.

Mr Wells: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Does that explain why, when the Minister was making his speech, there were only five Members on the SDLP Benches and only six on the Sinn Féin Benches?

Mr Speaker: Order. That was not a point of order, but I am sure that the Member knows that. Let us move on.

North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programmes

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I am disappointed to hear that the low attendance in the House was because people thought that it was me who was speaking instead of the Health Minister. *[Laughter.]* I see that the reality has struck; they have all left. Even my own lot have left.

The North/South Ministerial Council met in special EU programmes sectoral format in Armagh on 21 November 2011. The Council last met in special EU programmes sectoral format in July 2011. I chaired the 21 November meeting and was accompanied by Minister Alex Attwood. The Government of the Republic of Ireland were represented by Brendan Howlin TD, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Council noted that we are still at an early stage with regard to the next round of EU programmes. The EU budget will not be agreed until 2012. Until it is agreed, we do not know how much will be available for structural funds programmes in general or for specific programmes, including any future Peace and INTERREG programmes. All the signs are good that there will be successors to the current programmes. However, until we know how much money there will be for those programmes, we cannot initiate meaningful discussions on programme development.

The Council discussed the main priorities for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in 2012 and reviewed the progress in finalising the business plan and budget for 2012. The plan will be brought forward for approval at a future Council meeting. Mr Pat Colgan, the chief executive of the SEUPB, updated the Council on how far the work of the SEUPB had progressed since July 2011. The Council noted the progress that had been made regarding the closure of the previous Peace II and INTERREG III programmes. The Council also noted the progress that had been made with regard to the Peace III programme. As at 31 October 2011, the Peace III programme had approved 149 projects worth around £240 million. That represented a commitment rate of approximately 80% of the programme budget. Total expenditure to date is some £85 million. As a result of that expenditure, the PEACE III programme had already met its EU spending target for 2011, which is around £75 million.

With regard to the INTERREG IVa cross-border co-operation programme, the SEUPB advised the Council that, as at the end of October 2011, the programme had spent around £50 million. The body remains confident that INTERREG will achieve its 2011 EU spending target of £55 million and that the 2012 spending target is also likely to be achieved. However, the SEUPB advised that, if the current pace of commitment and spend continues for much longer, there is a significant risk to the achievement of EU spending targets in 2013 and 2014 and as much as £35 million could be lost if those targets are not achieved. That is because, when programme expenditure fails to meet the relevant EU target, the European Commission deducts any shortfall between actual expenditure and target expenditure from the programme budget. The SEUPB advised that it is working with officials in both jurisdictions to manage that identified risk and to ensure that no funds are, in fact, deducted. The SEUPB noted that the risk is not immediate and that there is ample time to address it.

The SEUPB advised the Council that the INTERREG risk has arisen on account of the time that it takes to approve applications for INTERREG funding. To date, it has taken on average a year to progress an INTERREG funding application, from the initial application stage to the final offer of programme funding. As a result, INTERREG has thus far allocated around £160 million, which is about 70% of its budget. The most recent round of project assessments is due to end next year. However, the SEUPB forecasts that there may be as much as £55 million still to allocate. The relevant Departments involved in the assessment and approval of applications have particular responsibilities to help to address the situation. As a result, there will need to be a further call for funding applications early in the new year. Officials are working with the SEUPB to ensure that the applications arising from that call will take significantly less time to process.

The SEUPB advised the Council on the progress that has been made by the five local authority-based groups under the INTERREG programme. The groups' situation is unchanged since July, when they had approved 19 projects worth around £22 million, which is well short of the £50 million that is their expected share of the programme budget. However, further local applications are currently under assessment, and the groups will be eligible to apply under the envisaged call for projects in the new year.

The SEUPB informed the Council of its ongoing efforts to facilitate North/South participation in INTERREG transnational and inter-regional programmes. The SEUPB is working with 47 projects that involve a Northern Ireland partner, and 17 projects with Northern Ireland partners are currently under assessment.

Finally, the Council noted that the SEUPB's annual report and accounts for 2010 had been certified by the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and will shortly be laid before the Assembly.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. The Minister will be aware of the concerns and, indeed, frustrations at times about the ability to spend, particularly, INTERREG funding and the tortuous application process involved. Will he outline what specific measures are being taken to ensure that the targets for INTERREG commitment and spend will be met? Will he confirm whether any work has been undertaken to identify the lessons learnt from current and previous spends in order to inform and, obviously, make the case for future funding programmes?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman for the question. As I said in the statement, a considerable amount of money is at risk, although we have been assured that there is still time to meet the requirements and get the money allocated.

A number of things have been done. First, the SEUPB is working with applicants to give feedback on applications to try to ensure that they come forward in a better form. Secondly, what normally happened was that the economists in the SEUPB did an assessment of the project, which then went to the sponsoring Department, where its economists did an assessment. Sometimes questions were thrown up that really should have been addressed at an early stage. Now, however, when an application comes in, the

economists from the sponsoring body and from the SEUPB work in parallel so that they look at the project at the same time. That means that any early questions are answered at that stage. The process is being done that way rather than being sequenced, because, on some occasions, sequencing has been one of the reasons for delay.

Other work still needs to be done. I really think that the SEUPB could do more through its internal organisation. It has the staff and the resources. It has economists whom my Department has lent it to help it through the process. It needs to work more closely with applicants and to give them feedback to ensure that applications come forward in a way that is acceptable at an early stage, as opposed to having a lot of toing and froing. The average time has been a year, and that is unacceptable. Members around the Chamber could probably identify projects that have taken well over a year. All it does, of course, is put people off even making applications.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer to the Chair's question; I, too, want to touch on the fact that around £35 million of INTERREG funds is potentially at risk of being lost. The Minister has outlined what has been done, but will he tell us what ongoing efforts will be made to ensure that Northern Ireland's economy does not lose those vital funds?

Mr Wilson: I outlined some of the things that we have already put in place and intend to follow through with the SEUPB. At the meeting, there were fairly robust exchanges with the SEUPB officials to ensure that they were clear about our concern, which the Member mentioned, that we do not see a penny of that money lost as a result of applications not being dealt with on time. I have also spoken to Ministers about the need for their Department, if it is the sponsoring Department, to ensure that there is no delay once applications go to it. I have written to one Minister about that, and I have spoken with other Ministers.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for his report. I know that he has a genuine interest in the area. The Minister will also know that I have been concerned for some time about the SEUPB's ability to deliver the full allocation of INTERREG IVA funding. In the past, we have been assured that there was no need for concern. I think that that is a direct quotation. Today, we are advised that the body is "likely" to achieve the 2012 spending target and that there is a "significant risk" — I think that I quote you correctly, Minister — to the years 2013 and 2014. Is the Minister satisfied that the SEUPB has the capacity and ability to deliver on those targets?

Mr Wilson: It has certainly been given the resources to deliver on the targets. In my view, the SEUPB is very well resourced. Indeed, some of the resources that were made available to it to close down PEACE II and INTERREG IIIa programmes have been left with SEUPB so that it has the additional resources. So, if there is need for streamlining with sponsoring Departments or for the SEUPB to talk to applicants to make clear to them what is required, there is no excuse as far as resources are concerned. I have had a complaint — it is with some justification — especially from the local authority groups, where the biggest underspend is to be found at the minute, that only £22 million of the £50 million has been allocated there.

At the beginning, the rules were not clear, and people were confused about what was required of them. The SEUPB must address those issues. I have been as upfront as I can with Members in highlighting the difficulties and the level of risk. It has been made very clear to the SEUPB that it will be judged on its ability to deliver. It has been given the resources to do that. There has been plenty of warning about the difficulties and action must be taken to deal with them.

12.00 noon

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What action has been taken to retrieve funding from groups that are in breach of the terms of their letters of offer?

Mr Wilson: We have an obligation to pursue such groups because that money will be clawed back by Europe, and it becomes a draw on our budgets in Northern Ireland. A number of groups with which there were difficulties and which did not adhere to the rules have been highlighted. In those cases, the SEUPB and the sponsoring Departments are looking at what should and can be done to retrieve funding. In cases in which it was clear that groups breached the terms of their letters of offer, the first thing that we did was stop further funding.

Mr Lunn: The Minister's party has supported David Cameron's actions over the past few days, and I agree with that attitude. However, in the longer term, given the new relationship that might evolve between Britain and the EU, is there any risk to the future of those programmes and our ability to influence them?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member is not on the Nick Clegg wing of the Alliance Party on the matter and that he agrees with the Prime Minister's stance in standing up for the United Kingdom. That is the right thing to do because the Prime Minister of any country should put his national interest first before he looks at any wider issues.

There are a number of issues. The UK Government dispute the size of the EU budget increase and quite rightly rejected the increase of over 5% demanded by the European Parliament and Commission. It would be preposterous to impose spending restrictions on devolved Administrations and then simply to say to Europe that we will hand over a 5% increase.

That will, of course, impact on the amount of money available for EU spending programmes. Nevertheless, in discussions with the Irish and Westminster Ministers, I was assured that they will push for programmes beyond Peace III and INTERREG IVa. Indeed, Brendan Howlin, who gave an undertaking at the meeting in Armagh, spoke to the UK Minister last week or the previous week in Poland.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. The East Border Region, which is my area, has a lot of experienced staff who know how to go about an application process. It still seems to be taking a long time to get through the process. Will the Minister assure the House that he will do all that he can to look at the criteria if that is what it takes to speed up the application process? Will he also indicate how much money will be committed to the INTERREG IVa programme? He says that £35 million is

at risk, but a figure of £55 million has also been mentioned. So, will you clarify exactly how much will be committed?

Mr Wilson: I think that I indicated that £55 million has been spent to date. There has been £163 million worth of projects approved. Sorry, £50 million has been spent, and the target for spending this year is £55 million. I do not think that there is any danger that the spending target for this year will not be met. The difficulty is getting further allocations made and getting the money spent within the time frame available, because, of course, all the money has to be spent by a certain date.

As for the local authority groups, I am still at a bit of a loss as to why some of their applications were deemed to be so poor that they could not be funded, especially when I look at the expertise that some of those groups have available to them. That is something that we sought to drill down into with the SEUPB at the meeting, although there is still work to be done to explain what is happening. A number of projects will go for assessments early in the new year. Hopefully, that will increase the amount of money that is allocated. The indications are that some of the projects that are under assessment are better than those that were assessed in the past.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement. In the second paragraph, he noted the issues around future programmes, including INTERREG and Peace. At a recent discussion that I had with them as Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, European officials indicated that, particularly for Peace IV, there is a requirement for a request from the two Governments to look at the application. I accept that these are very early stages, but it is important that we move that request on. Has the Minister had any discussions about that request, and when can we expect it to come from the two Governments?

Mr Wilson: I spoke to Brendan Howlin, who is the Minister in the Republic. We had a conversation about that as late as the November meeting. The last time that I had any discussion with Ministers in Westminster about this was in July when I spoke to Justine Greening before she moved to the Department for Transport. Again, there was a commitment there, although, understandably, she made it quite clear that the priority for the Government at Westminster was to ensure that European spending was kept within what they regarded as acceptable limits. I support them on that.

Mr A Maginness: I assure the Minister that I was here at 10.30 am waiting for him to make his statement.

Mr Wilson: My number one fan.

Mr A Maginness: I would not say "fan".

I thank the Minister for his statement. Obviously, there is great concern about the risk to money here. In particular, I want to focus on the local government bodies. In your statement, you said that there have been 19 approved projects, worth around £22 million, which is well short of the £50 million. Does the Minister know how many projects were advanced? He might not know that at this moment, so perhaps later on, he could indicate the number. Have a disproportionate amount of projects not been approved by the SEUPB?

Mr Wilson: I am just looking through my notes. I can vaguely remember a figure of 61 for the number of projects that were advanced. To date, 19 have been approved, and there are some other projects still being assessed, as I said, which, hopefully, should be allocated. I think that those amounted to £5 million, which will bring the total up to £27 million in the new year. However, the vast majority of projects submitted have not been approved. The ratio is around 2:1.

Mr Allister: Given that there is an anticipated INTERREG target shortfall of £35 million in 2013-14, according to the statement, £55 million of unallocated funds under INTERREG, local authority groups having approval for just £22 million out of a spend of £50 million, and nothing having been approved since the most recent meeting in July, does all of that not point to bad planning, hopeless administration and poor oversight by the SEUPB even though it is one of the most handsomely funded bodies that exists in these austere times?

I want to ask the Minister one further question — one that he does not like me to ask, not that that would encourage me to do so. Has he taken the opportunity to raise with the SEUPB the disparity and imbalance in the community background of its workforce?

Mr Wilson: First, I want us to be clear about the money that is at risk in the INTERREG programme. As I understand it, the money at risk, when all the issues that the Member has highlighted are in place, is £35 million, not the separate shortfalls that he has mentioned. One way in which the issue of the local authority-based groups might be dealt with is to put money into a bigger pot. That would not be an acceptable solution. Some local authority-based projects are actually some of the best. However, it is one way to deal with the money. The net risk figure is £35 million.

As far as the SEUPB's workforce is concerned, I have made it quite clear to the Member on other occasions that I judge a body by the quality of its work rather than by the background of the people involved in it. I must say, however, that, at present, I am concerned about the body. I share the Member's concern. He was quite correct in the assessment that he made at the beginning of his remarks: the SEUPB is a well-funded body. It is funded to the level of profession that we have been told that it requires — indeed, perhaps, to a greater level. Yet, issues have arisen that have caused me concern. I can tell the Member that there have been robust exchanges between the SEUPB and me, with regard to the funding that it has been allocated and its performance. I will keep that under review.

I want to put on record that I have been assured by Pat Colgan that he and the SEUPB will ensure that money is not given back. That is an important assurance and one to which the body will be held. We have not simply looked for assurances, we have asked for them. It is important that if there are difficulties, I, as Minister, am aware of what I can do to try to aid the process. As I said, I have already spoken to some Ministers about issues raised in their Departments. We have also looked at how we might streamline the relationship between the SEUPB and Departments when it comes to assessing and working our way through applications.

Committee Business

Osteoporosis: Fractures

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is a motion from the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place an emphasis on measures to prevent fractures resulting from osteoporosis in older people, aimed at helping to improve their health outcomes.

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I move the motion on behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

12.15 pm

I am sure that Members will be aware that osteoporosis is a chronic, progressive skeletal disorder, characterised by low bone mass, which makes people more susceptible to fractures. In 2009, 72,000 people in the North of Ireland had osteoporosis. It is a condition that occurs mainly in older people, especially women. A quarter of women will have osteoporosis by the time that they are 80 years old. Given that osteoporosis affects mainly older people, the number of people with osteoporosis will increase as the population ages. Therefore, with our acknowledged ageing population, osteoporosis is not an issue that will go away.

Osteoporosis is often referred to as a silent disease, as it rarely causes any symptoms until a fracture occurs. However, when a person with osteoporosis suffers a broken bone, the seriousness of the condition quickly becomes apparent. For example, women aged over 45 — I am getting close to that myself — spend more days in hospital as a result of osteoporosis than because of diabetes, heart attacks or breast cancer.

Fragility fractures are associated with substantial disability, pain, reduced quality of life and death. They can impair the ability to live independently in the community and can result in admission to nursing homes or residential care. Fractures can occur anywhere in the skeleton, but the most common sites are the wrists, the hips, the spine and the upper arms. Such fractures have a profound impact on quality of life and morbidity. For example, a fracture to the spine can lead to a curvature of the spine and loss of height, which is associated with breathing and digestion problems; a broken wrist can make even the most basic tasks, such as getting dressed or using the toilet, virtually impossible; and hip fractures are particularly devastating and represent the most common cause of accident-related deaths in older people. Unfortunately, there is a rising trend in the number of hip fractures.

An audit that was carried out in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast City Hospital, Altnagelvin Hospital and the Ulster Hospital revealed some shocking statistics. Between 1985

and 2007, there has been a 59% increase in hip fractures here. The figures for the period 2002-07 show that 20% of patients who lived in their own homes and broke a hip died after 12 months, while 40% of patients who lived in a nursing home passed away over the same period. Therefore, if five people who live in a nursing home break a hip, two will be dead after 12 months. Those are shocking statistics and they reveal how devastating fractures can be to a person's life chances. For some, they really do signal a death sentence.

Fragility fractures account for 70% of the inpatient work and 35% of the outpatient work in a fracture unit, and it has been estimated that the number of fragility fractures will double in the next 40 years. The care of fragility fractures is very expensive. A total of £70 million is spent each year here, which makes a significant dent in the healthcare budget. The average stay in hospital after a hip fracture is 26 days, and the cost per person to treat a hip fracture is £20,000.

So, what can be done to prevent fragility fractures? A variety of factors contribute to the development and maintenance of healthy bones. Those include a well-balanced diet, including foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, weight-bearing exercises, exposure to sunlight by going outside during the day, and not smoking. Osteoporosis can be prevented by building strong bones in childhood and early adulthood, and it is yet another example of a condition where, if a child gets a good start in life, a multitude of problems and suffering can be avoided down the line. During the previous mandate, I did quite a piece of work on encouraging young girls and teenage girls to drink more milk to try to increase their calcium levels, not just because it was good for our dairy farmers but because it is good to build healthy bones for the future. To that end, we need more public awareness about the importance of good bone health for parents and for teenagers and younger people. They must realise that if they do not look after their bones now, they will suffer in later life.

Although prevention is vital, there will always be people who develop osteoporosis later in life. There are drugs that can be prescribed, in particular to post-menopausal women with osteoporosis, to help to protect against bone fractures by slowing down the loss of the materials that make up the bone or by helping to build new bone. Those drugs have been shown to reduce by up to 50% the chance of a person with osteoporosis sustaining a fracture.

One of the problems, however, is that some people cannot take the drugs that are offered to them in the first instance. Those drugs are known as bisphosphonates. They require people to fast before taking them or to remain upright for a certain length of time after taking them. Some people are unable to swallow them, while others suffer unpleasant side effects, such as heartburn. However, alternative but more expensive drugs are available for people who cannot take bisphosphonates. Newer treatments can be given subcutaneously or intravenously, which has the potential to increase compliance. People need to get drugs that they are able to take.

There is no point in giving someone a medicine that they will not take. Statistics show that in Britain, 68% of patients are not taking their osteoporosis medication after 12 months. Therefore, the more expensive drugs need to be administered where necessary. We must always keep in mind that if someone breaks a hip, it will end up costing

the health service a minimum of £20,000, never mind the subsequent social care costs. We heard much this morning about caring for people at home and about home being the hub. We need to do more to help to prevent the accidents that will take people out of their home environment.

As well as the use of medication, the prevention of falls is a key method of tackling fragility fractures. Older people rarely get fractures unless they fall. Therefore, if we can reduce falls, we can reduce the number of people with osteoporosis sustaining fractures, be they to the hip, wrist or vertebrae. In addition, more needs to be done to help people prevent themselves from falling. Sometimes, only very simple interventions are required. For example, when our Committee met the chairpersons of the local commissioning groups in October, they told us that, in one area — I think that it was the Northern Board area — there was a team of people who give out new slippers to older people. That seems to be a fairly simple thing to do, but it prevents falls because people are walking in good quality slippers that fit them. Not only does it prevent the misery of enduring a broken hip, but it potentially saves the health service thousands of pounds in surgery, hospital stays, and so on, all for the price of a pair of slippers.

The House of Commons all-party parliamentary osteoporosis group produced a report in June 2011. Its inquiry found:

"In neglecting the nutritional needs of older people, an opportunity is being missed to reduce their risk of ... fractures."

The report contends that dietary supplements have a role to play, but so does good general nutrition. Again, in the debate earlier today, questions were asked about diet and access to good nutrition. I know that many Committee members will join with me in expressing their support for the work done by organisations such as Community Meals and others to provide people with nutritious meals.

The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety recognises that the Department has taken steps over the years to tackle osteoporosis. I welcome the fact that the Minister recently attended the National Osteoporosis Society's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration and that the Department has developed a service framework for the health and well-being of older people, which will be launched in 2012. The overall aim of that framework is to improve the health and well-being of our senior citizens, and it will examine a range of measures aimed at reducing falls among older people.

I urge the Minister to keep the issue firmly on his radar, particularly over the coming months, when many challenges are bound to face our health and social care services. Prevention and early intervention are key. In the way in which we treat osteoporosis, we have the opportunity to make a real difference, not just to people's quality of life and health outcomes but to how long they manage to live the independent and dignified life that we all strive for. I urge Members to support the motion.

Ms Lewis: As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I support the motion. Osteoporosis causes fragile bones and is a long-term condition that can lead to painful and disabling fractures. One in two women and one in five men will suffer a fracture at some point after the age of 50, mainly because of

poor bone health. Osteoporosis affects 72,000 people in Northern Ireland. There were 4,700 hospital admissions for hip fractures in the region in 2007-08, costing £120 million to treat and care for. Much can be done to prevent those fractures through proper diagnosis, treatment and care for people who have osteoporosis and/or are at risk of falls. However, only a minority of patients in Northern Ireland are identified, leaving them at risk of painful, debilitating and costly broken bones.

I welcome the Minister's response to a letter from the Chair of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety earlier this year, which set out what exactly he was doing about it. At present, all those over 50 who require a hip replacement or suffer a non-hip fracture are subject to assessment to see whether they have osteoporosis. Patients are diagnosed, reviewed every year and receive advice on how to decrease the risk of a fracture. I am also pleased that the Minister has launched the development of a new home accident prevention strategy in his Department for publication next year. That is vital given that we in Northern Ireland have an ageing population, and that will obviously have a major implication for healthcare, as the older we get, the more dependent we become on health treatment and services.

Coupled with the new policy, I welcome the new service framework for older people's health and well-being, which will include a number of standards in relation to falls, especially their prevention. I also wish to highlight the report of the fragility fracture working group that was published by the HSC Public Health Agency in 2009, which outlines the standard of fracture prevention services that all health and social care trusts should be providing. What steps is the Minister taking to implement the recommendations?

Over the past few years, standards have been raised on our high streets and in shopping centres to provide easier access for those who are disabled. Many of those standards have also helped the elderly to access shops without fear of tripping and falling, which, statistically, results in fractures in older people. We need to look at our footpaths, because even young and healthy people can come undone during lengthy spells of icy weather, so imagine how much worse it can be for those who are older and vulnerable. Young people are able to cope with fractures more easily. That is not to say that they do not suffer but their recovery is much quicker. That is not the case for the elderly, and we must ensure their protection and health and well-being.

We owe it to our ageing population to provide them with the help that they need to live as healthy a life as possible and to secure their independence. We need to do more to assist those with osteoporosis in diagnosis and treatment and to implement prevention measures where possible. I, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Speaker: We now move to the lunchtime suspension. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Commissioners

1. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education to outline the timetable for the termination of the appointments of the commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQO 1003/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My focus is on delivering the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) in April 2013 and on ensuring, in the interim, stability and good governance in the education and library boards and other education bodies. However, as I indicated during the debate in the House on 28 November, I have asked my officials to explore the feasibility of reconstituting the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB), pending the establishment of ESA, and to provide me with advice on that matter. I will let the Assembly know when I have reached my conclusions on that advice.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer. In light of the proposals by commissioners for closures for the board, does the Minister not feel that it is time that we speeded up the process to get rid of the commissioners so that local politicians can have accountability for the board?

Mr O'Dowd: In many aspects, it is regrettable that there are still commissioners on the South Eastern Education and Library Board. However, in a sense, that was held hostage to the establishment of ESA. I am thankful that we have now had the political breakthrough that is required for the establishment of ESA and that we are moving towards the implementation of that Executive objective. As I said, I have asked my officials to look at the issue to see how feasible it is to reconstitute the board in the time frame that we are working towards: ESA is to be in place by April 2013. The democratic accountability for any decision about a school closure comes through the consultation process that the boards have to undertake and the consultation process that my Department has to undertake. Any decision on a school closure rests with the Minister of the day.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister assure the House that the role and functions of the board are still being carried out as they should be, in a transparent and accountable manner?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, the same responsibilities are on the commissioners as are on other boards to ensure that their functions are carried out in an open and transparent manner. The chief executive of the SEELB is accountable to the permanent secretary of my Department as senior

accounting officer in the Department. All functions and services that are carried out by the board are open to full scrutiny.

Mr McDevitt: I welcome the Minister's acknowledgement that the situation is unsustainable. It is clearly, to a large extent, unaccountable, because of the lack of democratic representation. Therefore, can he provide a specific timeline for when he will receive the advice from his officials and a timeline for when he might take a decision to reinstate local councillors on to the South Eastern Board?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not wish to give a definitive timeline. Clearly, it has to be carried out urgently, as we are rapidly heading towards the end of this calendar year and towards next year and the legislative process that will see the establishment of ESA. Therefore, I have asked my officials to come back to me with the advice. Once the advice is received, I will consider it as urgently as is prudent to do so. Once I have done so, I will report back to the House on my findings and what the next steps will be.

Mr Agnew: What meetings, if any, has the Minister had with the commissioners on the future of Bangor Central Integrated Primary School and its town centre location?

Mr O'Dowd: I have had no meetings with the commissioners on that matter, and I have not had any correspondence from the commissioners on that matter. The Member may have been in correspondence with me on that matter already but, to refresh my memory on that, he should write to me, and I will correspond with him accordingly.

Schools: Rural Areas

2. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education what assessments are carried out of the impact that the closure of a rural primary school would have on its community. (AQO 1004/11-15)

12. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of whether it is adequate to apply rural proofing to a policy rather than to individual schools that are earmarked for closure. (AQO 1014/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 2 and 12 together as they are both about the possible closure of rural schools.

I wish to make it clear that my first priority is the educational well-being of pupils in all schools, whether they are urban or rural. This has been and will continue to be my overriding priority when considering any proposals to close a school. The sustainable schools policy is my Department's framework for assessing the viability and long-term sustainability of schools.

The policy addresses the issue of rural schools and it was rural proofed before publication in 2009. For any school that is proposed for closure, the managing authority must bring forward a published development proposal. An integral element of every development proposal is consultation. Before publication, those directly affected by the proposal, including the parents of pupils, must be consulted. After publication, there is a two-month period in which anyone throughout the community may make their views known to my Department. All comments received are taken into consideration when I make a final decision on the proposal.

I have stated on a number of occasions, but am happy to reiterate, that each proposal for the closure of a school is considered in the context of its own local area, and all pertinent issues form part of my considerations. As part of my considerations, I will seek to ensure that the pupils in rural schools have access to high-quality education.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. I am sure that he would agree with me that rural schools are the hub of their communities and that their closure would leave a huge gap. Will the Minister advise me as to what leeway is given to a rural school that finds itself in an unsustainable situation?

Mr O'Dowd: Given that choice of language, if we have a rural school in an "unsustainable situation", it begs the question of why we maintain that school. We first have to ensure that we do not allow the majority of our rural schools to reach that condition. Each school will be judged on its own merits. The sustainable schools policy allows for rurality and the needs of rural communities to be taken into consideration. Indeed, the classification in the sustainable schools policy of "rural" is probably the broadest of any departmental policy. A school is considered rural if it is outside the Belfast City Council area and outside the urban area of Derry City Council, so the vast majority of our schools are classed as rural in that context.

When a rural school is being assessed, it is different in a number of criteria. For instance, urban primary schools are based on pupil numbers of 140; rural primary schools on 105, which again takes into account their rurality. Accessibility to the community is also taken into account when assessing our rural schools. Through any development proposals that come forward, rural communities and their elected representatives will be able to bring forward any relevant information about the needs and requirements of that community and why a specific school should remain in the future. However, all decisions will also have to be judged on the basis of the needs of the pupils in the school. We cannot plan our future education system on the needs of school buildings. It will be based on the needs of the pupils in those schools.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister agree that rural proofing would be more effective if it were to be tied into the outcomes of the sustainable schools policy, such as school closures, rather than into the policy itself?

Mr O'Dowd: In equality monitoring, rural proofing or rural monitoring, best practice has been that actual policies are rural proofed, and this policy has been rural proofed. There are rural-specific determinations in the policy that allow rural schools the space and particular arrangements that they need to develop and to remain sustainable. For instance, if the viability audit outcome identifies a rural school as unsustainable into the future, and if a development proposal is brought forward for closure, that proposal is open to further scrutiny. It is open to elected representatives and the local community to come forward to present the uniqueness around each school. The sustainable schools policy and the development proposals around possible school closures are open, transparent and democratic. However, that does not in any way eradicate the need to make difficult decisions around schools, whether in rural or urban communities. I emphasise, as I did to the previous questioner, that it is the needs of the pupils of the school, not the buildings, that we

should be concerned about. The needs and the educational requirements of the pupils in the school are our main concern.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the specific accessibility and transport needs of rural schools be considered as part of the viability audit?

Mr O'Dowd: The simple answer is yes. The sustainable schools policy outlines different criteria for rural primary schools, as I have clearly stated. Accessibility is built into the six principles surrounding the sustainability of schools, as is rural transport, which is a key factor for many rural communities. The number of schools in an area and how long the expected travel times for children would be will be taken into account when assessing area planning.

Mr McCarthy: I heard what the Minister said about the criteria and assessment. Was that process carried out in the case of Ballykeigle Primary School? That school is to close. It has gone through the system, yet Ards Borough Council, of which I am a member, and others have made representation to your Department in support of that school.

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board announced in a development proposal that Ballykeigle Primary School was one of the schools that would close. That is now open to another consultation process. There are opportunities for you and your colleagues to make representations to the board, and when the decision comes to my Department officially, there will be opportunities for elected representatives and local community representatives to make representations directly to me as Minister. The sustainable schools policy criteria and those representations will be taken into consideration before I reach a decision on any school.

Grammar Schools: Pupils

3. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education in how many wards do fewer than 10% of children who live within the ward attend a grammar school. (AQO 1005/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2010-11, the school census showed that 42% of pupils at post-primary schools attended a grammar school. At ward level, the percentage of pupils attending grammar schools ranged from 3% in the Keady ward to 96% in the Malone ward. There were a total of 21 wards in which fewer than 10% of children who lived within the ward attended a grammar school. Those were all lower-income wards.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that there is clearly a direct correlation between the wealth of a child's family and access to grammar-school education? Further, does he agree that in many areas, such as Ballymena in my constituency, the worst affected group is that of Protestant working-class males?

Mr O'Dowd: Figures reached through studies into these matters show that the lower ranked the area of social deprivation one lives in, the less likelihood there is of going to a grammar school. That is based on a number of factors. It has been shown that young people and families from socially deprived areas are less likely to do well in education. We all have a responsibility to tackle that. There is also evidence that tutoring happens in order to prepare

for tests to access a school, which is to the detriment of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, I will emphasise one thing that I have said on numerous occasions. Just because a school has a sign saying "grammar school" hanging from its front gate does not necessarily make it a good school. There are excellent examples of schools that are non-selective, that operate in areas of high social deprivation, and that are turning out excellent academic results. Those schools are also turning out excellent young adults who value themselves and will undoubtedly become valuable members of our society.

Mr P Ramsey: Will the Minister outline whether he believes that grammar schools have a future in Northern Ireland?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not fixated on the title that a school wishes to give itself. It can call itself a grammar school, high school, college; I am not fixated on its title. I am concerned about the entrance criteria used by a number of our schools. That is the matter of concern, not the individual school or its title.

As I understand it, there is nothing in legislation that requires a grammar school to use academic selection. Any school wishing to move away from academic selection could do so. What title a school chooses to give itself is open to discussion with my Department. I want to see an education estate that is open to all young people and centres of education that do not ask children at the age of 11, "are you clever?", but ask, "how are you clever?" It is the duty of educationalists to grow that acorn and to light the spirit of education in every pupil.

2.15 pm

Mr Beggs: The Minister mentioned underachievement in certain areas. Does he accept that high levels of absenteeism, with less than 85% attendance, make a major contribution, and will he advise how he is working with all the various partners and other agencies to improve the situation so that young people will meet their full potential?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, high absenteeism from school will clearly have a detrimental effect on an individual's schooling. My Department regularly works with the boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and other managing authorities to ensure that all measures possible are being used to encourage young people to attend school. However, there are clearly sections of our society that, for generations, have been divorced from education. They do not understand the need for education and, perhaps because of a poor education experience themselves, have turned off, and their children have turned off.

I am studying a public information advertising campaign — similar to the Public Health Agency's campaigns to improve community health — to improve all our communities' understandings of the need for education and the individual family members' responsibility around education, and to empower them to be part of the education community so that they feel comfortable engaging with their local schools. Clearly, if we have young people who are not attending school, their education will suffer. We have a number of programmes in place to challenge that. My Department, the boards and the managing authorities work closely together in tackling those figures.

Schools: Viability Audit

4. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Education when he expects to report on the outcome of the schools viability audit. (AQO 1006/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have asked for the viability audit reports to be submitted to my Department by the boards by 16 January 2012. The initial completion date for the audit was the end of December 2011. My Department issued the aggregated school budget figures for the next three years to all schools in November, and I agreed to extend the deadline for completion of the audit to 16 January 2012. That extension will enable the boards to include a more accurate assessment of the financial stability of schools following the recent budget adjustments directing more money to the aggregated schools budget, alongside the assessments of quality of provision and enrolment trends.

It is important to remember that the viability audit is to identify schools that are under stress in terms of viability, now and in the future. It is the start of a process that will largely be taken forward through area planning. However, I have already indicated to the House that the audit will not be used to delay any necessary actions to protect the educational well-being of pupils. I will, therefore, continue to take decisions on development proposals already initiated, including those for school closures, in the best interests of pupils.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for the clarification. Will he assure the House that the assessment and decisions taken on foot of the audit will be done across the whole of Northern Ireland and not confined to the existing board boundaries?

Mr O'Dowd: It will be, in the sense that I have asked boards, CCMS and the other managing authorities to look beyond existing boundaries, because pupils travel back and forth across boundaries, so it is only natural that any future planning of our schools estate has to take place on that basis. The viability audit will focus on each individual school at this stage. I have asked the boards and managing authorities to come back to me with proposals for any school that is under stress. That does not necessarily mean automatic closure. There could be a number of different scenarios surrounding those schools and how we assist them going into the future.

The importance of the viability audit at this stage is to identify schools that are under stress, so that the Department and the managing authorities have a clear and robust picture on the way forward and how we deal with schools under pressure. However, I do want to see circumstances in which we are not constrained by board boundaries and the boards, CCMS and all others are planning on a regional basis and are aware of the needs of their education partners around them.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give us some indication of how he intends to process the information produced as a result of the audit, in light of the bombshell that was sent to schools last week regarding the 5% reduction in the age-weighted pupil unit? Will he clarify whether he believes that that correspondence leaves the viability audit in a very precarious situation and that, unfortunately, nearly all schools will end up in a deficit position, leaving our educational estate to face a very grim future heading into 2012?

Mr O'Dowd: It has been clear since the budget was set in the last parliamentary term that education faces very difficult decisions in the time ahead. I have referred to the worst education budget in modern history, and that is no exaggeration. As we went through the submissions on schools' three-year work programmes, it became clear to my departmental officials and me that schools had not taken on board the full implications of the budget. I had regular discussions with school heads and school leaders in various fora in which I undertook to pass information on to schools about their budgets as early as possible. I did that. The purpose of the November letter was to give schools a very clear picture of what the future looked like.

I accept that when the figures are in black and white in front of a board of governors or a principal, they make very stark reading. I do not accept, however, that they make the viability audit impossible, unnecessary or unviable. I have extended the deadline for several weeks to allow the new information to be factored in. However, if we do not take action on the viability audit, we will retain our 85,000 empty school desks and our unsustainable schools estate. That drain alone will have another detrimental budgetary effect on those schools in the future. Therefore, the viability audit and area planning will go ahead. I will continue to engage with my Executive colleagues, including the Finance Minister, and, indeed, I will continue to interrogate my budget to see whether there are any further ways in which we can assist schools.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister may have touched on some aspects of my supplementary already, but I want clarification. Will the Minister confirm that the viability audit is not aimed at drawing up a list of schools for closure, as has been claimed by some sections of the media and, indeed, some parties in the Chamber?

Mr O'Dowd: No, it is not the function of the viability audit to draw up a list of schools for closure. Its function is to identify schools that are under pressure. I want the boards, CCMS and the managing authorities to come back to me with worked-out plans of how they intend to deal with it. A number of schools may close as a result; that is a necessary decision. However, each school will be judged on its own merits. Each school will have to go through a full development proposal before any decision can be made on its closure.

The viability audit is not about drawing up a list of schools for closure. It is to ensure that the Department and the managing authorities are aware of the state of each individual school, how we will deal with that school and how we protect our very limited budget.

Academic Selection Tests

5. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Education what information he has received from grammar schools about the funding of academic selection tests. (AQO 1007/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 11 October 2010, the previous Education Minister wrote to schools operating unregulated entrance tests. In the interests of transparency, she sought to obtain details of how all schools funded or contributed to the costs associated with the development, provision and administration of their tests. Most schools did not provide

information. However, some schools that were using a test for which parents were not charged were clear that they were not using their delegated budget to fund the entrance test. Others stated that any such use of their delegated budget was within the terms of the delegation.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister's Department have concerns about the legality of schools' charging pupils to sit unregulated tests?

Mr O'Dowd: We have concerns. Whether a school is funded by a private donor to set unregulated tests — it appears that that is happening in a number of cases — or a school or parents are covering the cost themselves, the fact is that parents are being charged to access publicly funded education. Even more worryingly, parents are being charged to have their children rejected from publicly funded education. That should be a matter of concern for us all. We have held on jealously to the right to education free at the point of delivery for preschool, primary-school and post-primary school education, and we have a situation where a number of schools are charging — or a private donor is covering the cost — either to allow a child into a school or to say to that child, "No, you are not coming into that school." So it is a matter that I intend to investigate further in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé dúinn. Does the Minister accept that parents are regrettably continuing to send their children for private tests? Does he also accept that he has a duty to deal with this impasse and to try to bring a resolution to it?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, parents are sending their children for unregulated testing, although it is a lesser number than used to do so. There is a responsibility on us all to deal with that matter. I am not asking people to come out to support my party's position on this. I am asking them to come out to support the position of their own party. Three of the five parties that sit round the Executive table are opposed to academic selection. The trade union movement, the Catholic Church and a significant number of academics and educationalists are opposed to it. I am not asking any of those people to come out to support my position. I ask them to support their position.

I am of the firm view that academic selection is educationally unnecessary and unsound. As we go into the future and look at the future construct of our schools estate, certain schools will be unfairly disadvantaged because a number of other schools are using clever marketing devices to bring in pupils. If people sit back on the Benches of this Chamber — or on any other bench, for that matter — and remain quiet about that, they cannot then turn round and say that it is up to the Education Minister to sort that out. If you have a policy and a belief, it is up to each individual organisation to come out to lobby for it to become a reality.

Mr S Anderson: Why is the Minister commenting on what he has previously described as private and breakaway tests?

Mr O'Dowd: As a democratically elected Minister of the Assembly, I work under the Standing Orders of the Assembly. So, when a Member submits a question and it is accepted by the Business Office and appears on the Order Paper, I am duty bound to answer it.

Preschool Education

7. **Ms Dobson** asked the Minister of Education what guidelines his Department has drawn up in relation to the draft Programme for Government commitment of guaranteeing a year's free preschool education. (AQO 1009/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Consultation on the draft Programme for Government is under way until 22 February 2012, after which a final draft Programme for Government will be agreed. The draft Programme for Government included a commitment to provide one year of funded preschool education for every child whose parent wants it. That aligns with the current aim of the Department's preschool education expansion programme, which was launched in 1998.

Preschool education places are available in statutory nursery schools, nursery units in primary schools and in voluntary and private preschool settings. In the 2011-12 preschool year, there are over 23,000 children in funded preschool education places. However, it is not always possible to make a place available in the setting expressed by a parent as the first preference. Once the Programme for Government is finalised, the Department will consider how best to ensure that that commitment is met.

In the meantime, the Department of Education will continue to work with the education and library boards and with the preschool education advisory group (PEAG) in each education and library board area. The PEAGS are responsible for the planning and provision of preschool places on behalf of the Department at local level to ensure that the aim of the preschool project is met.

2.30 pm

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 2, 8 and 13 have been withdrawn. Questions 2 and 8 require a written answer.

Police Museum

1. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the progress in producing the business case for the police museum. (AQO 1018/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I continue to fully support the creation of a police museum. However, some issues remain to be resolved before the outline business case presented by the RUC GC Foundation can be approved and submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). There are outstanding questions in respect of running costs, income generation, security considerations and planning issues.

I convened a meeting at Brooklyn in July, and my officials have held a number of meetings over the past few months with the Police Service, the Northern Ireland Museums Council and the RUC GC Foundation and have had discussions with the Planning Service and the Policing Board to progress the business case. Key stakeholders held a round-table meeting yesterday to address the outstanding issues as a matter of priority to enable the business case to be finalised. Further work is to be undertaken over the next four weeks by my officials, the RUC GC Foundation and

the PSNI with a view to having all matters concluded and my Department ratifying the business case for DFP approval.

Mr Givan: To say that I am disappointed at how this matter is being progressed is an understatement. I have to impress on the Minister that he needs to take personal control of the issue because there is a clear feeling that officials in his Department who have been tasked with dealing with the issue are procrastinating and delaying, some would suggest deliberately so, and a scheme that has taken years —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Givan: — to get to this point needs to be progressed as a matter of urgency. I ask the Minister to make this one of his priority schemes and move it forward.

Mr Ford: I made it clear that I personally convened a meeting at Brooklyn in July, and my officials have been following the matter up. I refute any suggestion that there is procrastination on the part of officials in the Department of Justice, but the reality is that business cases have to be met, and issues relating to matters such as planning and security, where concerns have been raised by the Police Service, also have to be met. That is my ambition, but it is not something that the Department can deliver on its own, and it is certainly not something that the Department is procrastinating on.

Mr Cree: In November 2001, the then Secretary of State John Reid promised the RUC GC Foundation that there would be a museum. Does the Minister think that 10 years is a long time to produce any sort of a business case?

Mr Ford: That may well be the case, but it is not the role of the Department to draw up the business case.

Interface Barriers

3. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the work being undertaken by his Department to support communities who want to see a reduction in the number of interface barriers within their areas. (AQO 1020/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am pleased to say that one of the commitments in the Executive's draft Programme for Government is to actively seek local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls. I see that as an important recognition of the significance of one aspect of the Department's ongoing work to create a safe and secure shared community for all people living in Northern Ireland.

The delivery of the commitment will require engagement from different parts of government and a number of statutory bodies. We will need to pull together not only to support communities as ideas for change are developed but to support communities through the actual change process. To facilitate that work, I asked Department of Justice officials to draw up plans to establish an interagency group. The idea is to bring relevant parties together to deal with issues that arise at interfaces around safety and security, as well as assisting and targeting funding in the most effective manner possible.

There are already signs of progress in dealing with interface structures. As Members will know, in September, we had the opening of a gate in the interface wall at Alexandra Park, which is an excellent example of cross-community working,

supported by statutory and other bodies. I am hopeful that, early in the new year, we will see Newington Street opened, and I am actively exploring the removal of the road barrier at Brucevale Park. I am also encouraged by the willingness of people in Duncairn Gardens to agree to the opening of an entry leading on to Hillman Street, which has been closed for many years.

The Department of Justice is exploring further opportunities for progress at interfaces in conjunction with community representatives, the Community Relations Council, Belfast City Council, the police and others. Clearly, the work will proceed at different speeds in different areas, but I hope to build a momentum for change.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the Minister's response and the evident step change that the Executive are taking to support communities in removing the physical divisions. Does the Minister agree that the evidence he has presented today contradicts recent media assertions that the number of physical interface barriers is increasing and that government are dragging their heels in addressing that issue?

Mr Ford: I am happy to confirm what my colleague has said. A week or so ago, the BBC's 'Hearts and Minds' unfortunately chose to report that the peace walls were getting higher; they are not. They said that there were more of them; there are not. No peace walls have been erected since the Northern Ireland Office erected one three years ago. That was a decision with which I, as a local representative in the north Belfast/Newtownabbey area, disagreed. The reality is that we now see constructive and positive engagement by local communities, supported by a range of agencies. Groundwork, for example, has been heavily involved in Alexandra Park. That ongoing community dialogue, supported by statutory bodies such as the city council and the police, has brought about real progress at removing peace walls, not building them higher or having more of them. I wonder if that will get on 'Stormont Today'.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I sincerely hope this does not get on 'Stormont Today'. Will the Minister ensure that adequate consultation with stakeholders, including those who live near a peace line, will take place before any action is taken on the issue?

Mr Ford: Absolutely; that is the approach the Department has taken. That is why we have seen such success in Alexandra Park. It was the result of ongoing significant engagement over a time by representatives from both sides of the divide, dealt with by Groundwork principally but with the full support of the statutory bodies that I named earlier. That is a positive example of how to make things work, and it is no surprise that other potential removals in that immediate area are following on from Alexandra Park.

Mr Copeland: Does the Minister agree that each of the so-called barriers exists for a reason and that, as has been said, the main contributors to any discussion surrounding their removal must be the communities who live in their shadow? Can he understand the necessity to set aside the considerations of politics and to act only in the interests of the security and safety of those who live on either side of the barriers?

Mr Ford: I do not think that there is anything political about responding to requests from local people to remove barriers, open gates or, as in Alexandra Park, open a gate for a short

time every day. Encouraging people to learn to remove the physical barriers, rather than maintaining them in a way that is damaging to society and to the economy, is the practical reality of how we will deliver a shared future.

Mr Storey: Given the Justice Minister's comments on removing physical barriers, will he join me in asking the roads Minister to ensure that he complies with the law regarding illegal signs? Such signs have been put up in the village of Rasharkin in my constituency. For the past six weeks, the police have failed, DRD has failed, the Minister has failed. Will he join me —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. That question is not relevant to the substantive question.

Mr Storey: It is. On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I cannot take a point of order until after Question Time.

Maghaberry Prison: Republican Protest

4. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Justice whether permission was given for the republican protest outside Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry on 25 and 26 November 2011 and what actions were taken against the aggressive protesters. (AQO 1021/11-15)

12. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Justice whether special or disturbance payments were made to prisoners in Maghaberry prison because of protests by dissident republicans over the weekend of 25 and 26 November 2011. (AQO 1029/11-15)

Mr Ford: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 4 and 12 together. The Northern Ireland Prison Service became aware that a vigil on the grounds of Maghaberry prison was being planned for 25 and 26 November, when details were posted on a website. Following discussions between the Police Service and the Prison Service, it was decided to facilitate a peaceful protest in the grounds of Maghaberry prison in line with articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights. No permission for the protest to take place was sought from NIPS. Officials attempted to make contact with the organisers of the protest in order to establish boundaries that would facilitate the protest. No response was received from the organisers. The governor, therefore, arranged for notices to be posted. Those notices made it clear that the protest must be conducted lawfully, peacefully and without threat or intimidation towards any persons and must not cause any disruption to the good order and safety of the prison.

During the protest, there was some minor disorder and damage to prison property. However, there were no injuries to police or prison officers. The PSNI, working in support of the Prison Service, had a robust criminal justice strategy in place and is currently examining CCTV footage of the protest. Any evidence of criminal behaviour on the part of individual protesters will be followed up by the Police Service and the Public Prosecution Service.

All prisoners were given £5 phone credit to allow them to keep in touch with families while the security operation necessitated the suspension of all domestic and legal visits on 25 and 26 November. The phone credit was paid from the prisoners' amenity fund, not from public funds.

Mr T Clarke: I am appalled that republican prisoners were facilitated in that illegal protest. Given that they trespassed on Prison Service land — I am led to believe that the Prison Service actually facilitated them by allowing them the use of the Quaker facility for toilets and running water — does the Minister agree that that was appropriate and that the only action that his Department should have taken was to have facilitated them inside the prison and put them behind bars?

Mr Ford: I think that Mr Clarke needs to distinguish between civil issues, such as trespass, and criminal activity. I made it clear that any suggestion of criminal activity is being followed up by the PSNI. The fact that facilities were made available is an issue for the Quakers who run the visitor centre. With regard to our responsibilities to maintain the European Convention on Human Rights, I believe that the actions taken by the Prison Service and the Police Service were proportionate in dealing with the protest. They also dealt extremely successfully with the minor disturbances that occurred.

Ms J McCann: The Minister will be aware that an agreement was made last August between independent facilitators, the prisoners and the prison administration after protests in Maghaberry prison at Roe House and that the recommendations from that agreement have not yet been implemented. Will the Minister use his office and influence to ensure that those recommendations are implemented in full in order to resolve the protest?

Mr Ford: I think, Deputy Speaker, that we are straying a little from the protest outside the prison. I regret that last year's August agreement has not been fully implemented because prisoners have not allowed that to happen and because, for example, there have been ongoing threats to prison officers. I remain committed to ensuring that all that is possible is done to bring that agreement into full operation, but that will be done on the basis of ensuring the safety and security of all prisoners, prison staff and prison visitors.

Mr Allister: What message does the Minister think it sends to troublemaking protesters when he begins his answer by proclaiming the paramountcy of their protection under articles 10 and 11 and has officials facilitate, through consultation with the Quaker centre, the opening of facilities for the protesters and then is unable to tell the House whether there will be an effective police follow-up action resulting in prosecutions?

Mr Ford: I trust that every Member of the House, whether legally qualified or not, accepts that there should be due process in any question of criminal prosecution.

Mrs McKeivitt: Will the Minister clarify what legal action, if any, will be taken against those who took part in the loyalist protest, which included the blocking of a road, outside Belfast City Hall on the evening of 1 December?

Mr Ford: Deputy Speaker, I really think —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I rule that that question is not relevant.

PSNI: Recruitment Contracts

5. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the award of contracts by the PSNI for the recruitment of agency, associate or consultancy staff. (AQO 1022/11-15)

Mr Ford: The recruitment of staff to the Police Service is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the board. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment on the employment of former officers. The award of contracts by the PSNI is, likewise, a matter for the Chief Constable. The Department of Justice is, however, responsible for ensuring that PSNI contracts, including those for the recruitment of agency, associate or consultancy staff, are procured through the Central Procurement Directorate and that the PSNI follows best practice guidelines, which are subject to internal audit arrangements. I am satisfied that the Police Service follows the appropriate processes.

Ms S Ramsey: Given the considerable public interest shown by the media and the Policing Board in the issues, some of the Minister's comments are disappointing. Will the Minister confirm whether the retired head of PSNI special branch is a long-standing friend of the Police Ombudsman's former director of investigation and has recently been rehired as a consultant on the past by the PSNI? It is an issue of public interest.

2.45 pm

Mr Ford: It may well be a matter of public interest, but Ms Ramsey highlighted in her own question that it is an issue of interest for the Policing Board. It, not the Minister or the Department, has responsibility for oversight of the work of the Chief Constable.

Mr I McCrea: Obviously, there is an agenda by Sinn Féin to try to ruin the good name of the RUC and those who served this community well. If the police or any other body gives people jobs, whether they are agency workers or employed directly, and it is done in an appropriate manner and according to the law, does the Minister agree that it is for them to decide whom they employ?

Mr Ford: I thought that I had made it clear: it is an issue for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Policing Board. My sole issue is to ensure that contracts are carried out properly and in line with Central Procurement Directorate instructions. That is my understanding of the position.

Mr McDevitt: I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. Is the Minister, as a custodian of the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in his capacity as a Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive and as the leader of a party that upholds the principles and full implementation of the Patten report, concerned that such practices could give rise to the perception that some aspects of the Patten agreement are being undermined through the back door?

Mr Ford: The Member, as a member of the Policing Board, is far better equipped than I am to follow up the issue of the practices of the Chief Constable. Members need to be very careful about what they might wish me to do as regards interfering with the decisions of the Chief Constable or some of the other agencies, such as the Public Prosecution Service. There may well be occasions when they would have wished me not to interfere. I shall maintain my position very carefully to ensure that I do not interfere with the Chief Constable's operational decisions in any circumstances.

Antisocial Behaviour

6. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to extend the powers of dispersal to the PSNI to deal with antisocial behaviour. (AQO 1023/11-15)

Mr Ford: Building safer communities by preventing antisocial behaviour and reducing the harm that it causes is a top priority for my Department and the Executive, as set out in the draft Programme for Government. I will publish a new community safety strategy early in the new year. It will set out proposals to address antisocial behaviour through working in greater partnership regionally and locally. The proposals will build on our approach to date of a graduated response, with prevention, intervention and enforcement where necessary. Members will be aware that that approach has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in the incidence of antisocial behaviour since 2008. Long-term trends, as measured by the Northern Ireland crime survey, show that fewer people think that antisocial behaviour is a big problem in their area.

It is worth noting that the preventative approach was endorsed during the public consultation on the strategy, with enforcement seen as the last resort. Indeed, there were no compelling arguments in support of additional powers, including dispersal powers. Therefore, I confirm that, at this time, I have no plans to extend the PSNI powers of dispersal.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. In light of the ongoing problem of antisocial behaviour throughout the Province, what real alternatives do you have to try to deal with the problem?

Mr Ford: When Mr Dunne speaks of the ongoing problem, he needs to acknowledge that it is an ongoing but reducing problem. I am well aware that those who suffer antisocial behaviour suffer 100% from it. The reality is that we have seen work done through a variety of approaches, including various types of preventative work and looking at issues like acceptable behaviour contracts, informal warnings and a relatively small number of anti-social behaviour orders issued in Northern Ireland in comparison with what has happened in many parts of Great Britain. The result of that is that we have seen the constructive reduction in antisocial behaviour. I hope that we will continue to see those proposals implemented with continuing good effect.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. The Minister alluded to preventative measures in his reply to the question from the Member on the Benches opposite. Will the Minister outline whether he has received any communications from the PSNI seeking new legislation, or does it feel that it has enough legislation as it stands?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mark Durkan. My apologies; I call Mr Ford.

Mr Ford: No, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not Mark Durkan.

As Mr McCartney correctly says and as I alluded to, no specific requests were made by the police or anybody else during the consultation for the sort of powers that Mr Dunne described.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will now call Mr Durkan, if he rises in his place.

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Does the Minister recognise the role that community safety wardens play in tackling antisocial behaviour and the need for them to be resourced accordingly?

Mr Ford: I am cautious of where that question might lead to, but I thank Mr Durkan for it. His perfectly valid question is about the role performed by community safety wardens in some areas. During a visit to Magee campus early on in my Ministry last year, I saw the work that was done by community safety wardens in Derry. That approach has clearly had a significant effect in what you might call the student area around Magee. There are other approaches that work elsewhere.

One of the virtues of the operation of CSPs and the future policing and community safety partnerships is the opportunity they provide for people to develop solutions that work in local areas in order to meet the needs that exist there. There are clearly very positive lessons to be learnt from the experience in Derry. We will have to see whether they work equally well elsewhere, if people want to introduce them.

Mr Beggs: Dispersal powers will simply move the problem from one area to another. Does the Minister agree that, as well as acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) and neighbourhood wardens, who have already been mentioned, detached youth workers play an essential role in addressing antisocial activity and in getting young people involved in constructive activity?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Beggs's point. What we have is a variety of approaches that start at the relatively simple end of prevention and work right through to the more obvious examples of antisocial behaviour that spill over into criminal activity. It is absolutely vital that we maintain those sorts of networks. Informal and formal youth work stops young people getting involved in difficulties. That is an approach that I endorse in general and that I believe community safety partnerships are helping with.

Public Services Training College

7. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the commencement date for the Desertcreat training college. (AQO 1024/11-15)

Mr Ford: The construction of Desertcreat training college is expected to start in January 2013 and to end in summer 2015. That is subject to any unforeseen events that may occur in a project of that size that could prevent procurement or construction remaining within the planned programme.

Mr McGlone: Does the Minister recognise that, in my constituency, a high and growing number of people who worked in the construction industry, including contractors, are now unemployed? Does he, therefore, recognise the necessity for that project to be delivered to that area and to Northern Ireland more widely, as it will be crucial in respect of not only the actual service but the jobs that it will deliver to the construction and service industries and to policing itself?

Mr Ford: I certainly recognise the significance of a capital scheme of that size, particularly in an area such as mid-

Ulster, where there is significant unemployment in the building trades. That is why we are looking at developing social clauses for the employment of apprentices or unemployed people and at the options for local procurement, so that we get the maximum economic and training benefit from the college.

Older People: Fear of Crime

9. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Justice what measures his Department is taking to allay the fear of crime that exists among older people. (AQO 1026/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Programme for Government demonstrates the Executive's commitment to continue working to ensure that older and vulnerable people are able to live their life free from the fear of crime. That commitment is also reflected in the range of measures that my Department is developing to tackle crime and to alleviate the fear of becoming a victim of crime among older and vulnerable people. Those measures include the new community safety strategy and will help to build safer, shared, more confident communities.

The new strategy will consider how to develop a wider understanding of the fear of crime in Northern Ireland and its particular impact on older and vulnerable people. It will look at a range of options to help to address the fear of crime, including how we support intergenerational projects and schemes, as I have just highlighted, such as neighbourhood watch and community safety wardens that provide reassurance and increased feelings of security for older and vulnerable people. My officials will continue to engage with members of the safer ageing steering group to ensure that the measures in the new community safety strategy deliver outcomes that address the fear of crime for older people. Members should also note that I have commissioned important work to develop a comprehensive strategic framework for reducing offending. Next year, I will also launch a public consultation on victims and witnesses of crime. All those strategies will support the work of the wider justice agencies and government in combating crimes against older and vulnerable people and allaying older people's fear of crime.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you very much, Minister. Will the Minister do anything more to reassure older people that Northern Ireland is perhaps one of the safest places to live as far as crime is concerned and that some of their fears — not all of them but some of them — may be exaggerated? Older people could perhaps be reassured that they can get peace in their own home.

Mr Ford: Dr McDonnell raises a very significant point. There is no doubt that there is a significant fear of crime among older people, which is simply not justified by the statistics. Statistics published last week show that males under the age of 24 potentially have something like a 7% chance of being involved in a violent incident in any year, whereas for people who are aged over 65 the chances are something like 0.3%. That is the practical reality. We all know that there are a small number of horrendous issues, where older people are subjected to very difficult and traumatic experiences. However, we should not exaggerate their frequency and should not suggest that that is in any way typical of society in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dickson: Does the Minister agree that recent debates in the Chamber and the media have inadvertently served to increase the fear of crime, whereas, as he has told us, such crimes, particularly those against the elderly, are on the decrease?

Mr Ford: Yes. There is a real danger that, if we concentrate too much on issues of crime against older people, we create the impression that it is a much more significant issue than it actually is. I repeat the statistics. According to last year's statistics, something in the region of 0.2% of those aged over 65 are likely to be the victim of vulnerable crime. That is a tiny fraction, yet the fear of that sort of crime is much higher. Therefore, while we should certainly encourage older people to take care for their own safety and should support voluntary organisations that assist older people with security, we should not exaggerate the scale of the problem.

DOJ: Staffing

10. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice how many staff are in his Department. (AQO 1027/11-15)

Mr McLaughlin: Ceist uimhir 10. Question 10, sorry.

Mr Ford: Don't worry, I had that.

At 1 October 2011, there were 4,169 staff working in my Department and its agencies.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister has previously given us assurance, but will he explain why, almost 18 months after it was established, there are staff in his Department who still refuse to give up their NIO terms and conditions?

Mr Ford: Such an issue is a personnel matter to be dealt with through personnel management. It is not an issue that I believe to be appropriate for the Minister. Clearly, members of staff have come into the Department of Justice through different routes. The overwhelming majority have been part of the mainstream Northern Ireland Civil Service for considerably longer than the 20 months since the DOJ was created. Individuals have a right to make their own decision on terms and conditions.

Mr Spratt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to refer question 5 to the Speaker in respect of Ms Ramsey's supplementary question, which did not refer at all to the actual question that was asked. Is it right and proper that any Member of the House should identify an individual who may well have been properly and legitimately re-employed by the Police Service?

Is that not a wrong practice and should that practice not cease in this House? I ask you to refer that question and to get a ruling from the Speaker on whether it is right and proper to identify in this House with no reason individuals who are rightly, properly and legitimately re-employed.

3.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Member will be aware that it is not the first time that a supplementary has not quite matched the original question. No doubt, it will be referred to the Speaker, as has happened in previous cases.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In relation to the same issue, with regard to question 3, will you have the issue referred to the Speaker and ask him to look at the point that I was leading to in relation to the question and to rule on it?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have to remind the Member that the question was not relevant. My decision on that is final. I also remind the Member that he came very close to questioning the decision of the Deputy Speaker.

Committee Business

Osteoporosis: Fractures

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place an emphasis on measures to prevent fractures resulting from osteoporosis in older people, aimed at helping to improve their health outcomes. — [Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr Gardiner: In June 2009, the fragility fracture group produced its report, 'The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland'. The audit showed a 15% increase in the number of hip fractures from 906 in 2002 to 1,037 in 2007. It also showed a 59% increase in hip fractures treated in Northern Ireland between 1985 and 2007.

The 30-day death rate associated with that was just over 7%, and the one-year death rate was over 22% for women and nearly 28% for men. After 12 months, of the patients admitted from their homes, 70% had returned home, just over 9% were still in nursing homes or other institutions, and nearly 20% had died. That last figure puts into context the seriousness of the subject that we are discussing. The report said that the evidence:

"highlights the need for urgent action to raise awareness of how individuals can look after their bone health and ensure early detection and treatment of osteoporosis and fragility fractures."

Prevention must be the new watchword for our National Health Service. Just as new primary care centres spring up over the next few years, we need a programme of education to make people more aware of disease prevention and how they can play an active part in the prevention of disease and, once diagnosed, its management.

The report recommendations spoke of the need to improve the existing IT infrastructure in fracture units, adding:

"There is a need to include all fragility fractures in this, especially those treated on an out-patient basis."

The improvement of IT systems links with the Minister's statement of last week, when he spoke of the need for video conferencing in early diagnosis and treatment.

The report recommended:

"A Fracture Liaison Service for secondary prevention of fragility fractures should be established in all Trusts that have A&E and Minor Injury Services to ensure secondary prevention is offered to all patients who have suffered a fragility fracture."

With so much care and treatment being devolved in future to primary care centres, there will be a need to train GPs in the necessary skills to play a greater role in diagnosis. We cannot rely on video conferencing alone to do that. I urge the Minister to look again at budgets for GP training in those skills, which are so important in the early diagnosis of the disease and various medical conditions.

At present, GPs often operate a referral service to hospital doctors who then diagnose the treatment for the patient. In future, GPs will have to play a greater role. To do that, they must be trained, especially in up-to-date diagnostic skills and treatment techniques. That is essential if primary care centres are to work effectively.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome and support the motion tabled by the Health Committee, of which I am a member. I was shocked to learn of the huge number of people in the North who suffer from osteoporosis and of the consequences that it can have for sufferers.

The statistics, as cited by Mr Gardiner, for the number of people who suffer fractures, particularly to their hips, do not lie. When those fractures occur in people of advanced years, 50% never fully recover, and, sadly, many die within a year of the fracture, which is completely unacceptable in this day and age. Not only is there that huge unnecessary human cost, but treatment of those fracture patients and their re-enablement, where much very good work is being done, comes at a huge financial cost to the Health Department. Across the UK, £6 million a day is spent on treating fractures. However, only 5% of that is spent on medication to treat osteoporosis and on fracture prevention.

Osteoporosis is treated in a reactionary fashion, and I appeal to the Minister, who has always displayed a disposition towards preventative measures, to take steps to address that. He could build upon the limited but effective areas of good practice that are already endorsing proactive methods of preventing damage caused by osteoporosis.

Across the UK, including some areas of the North, fracture liaison services have been established. Those services allow a patient to have a consultation with a fracture nurse, access to a DXA scan and access to local expert bone-health services. Already, fracture liaison services have had success in identifying patients with osteoporosis, allowing early diagnoses and limiting pain for patients. Although I recognise the budgetary constraints within which the Department must operate, we have to look at where we can not only enhance patient care through investment but realise savings in the long term. A recent evaluation showed that fracture liaison services have the potential to do both. We must explore that further.

We must ensure that it becomes the norm for anyone treated for fractures to be checked for osteoporosis. A move to implement fracture liaison services is the best option for ensuring good practice, and current National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance estimates that a full fracture liaison service would prevent a significant number of fragility fractures. Moreover, it should be a cost-effective move that benefits the Department as well as its patients. I support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: I support this very important motion. As a member of the Health Committee, I thank the Chairperson for very ably proposing the motion.

Like others, I attended an event last week in the Long Gallery, where the effects of this condition were very clearly presented, as well as advice on how to deal with fractures in the first place and, therefore, avoid the very painful condition of osteoporosis.

The main emphasis must be on having ways and means for implementing comprehensive fracture prevention services right across Northern Ireland. At the reception to mark 25 years of work in Northern Ireland by the National Osteoporosis Society, we were told, as has been mentioned, that up to 72,000 people in Northern Ireland have that complaint.

Osteoporosis is a long-term illness. It causes fragility in bones, which can and does lead to painful and disabling fractures in men and women. Fragile bones can devastate lives by robbing people of their independence, mobility and quality of life. We need to see the provision of a fracture liaison service in Northern Ireland, from which people can benefit after they have had a fall and broken a bone. That should be available in each trust.

Members will have read the report entitled 'The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland', which was published in June 2009. I wonder what progress has been made since its publication. The report made nine recommendations. On 18 February 2010, the current Deputy Chairperson of the Committee asked how implementation of those recommendations was progressing. Although the then Minister agreed that he wanted to see that important work taken forward as quickly as possible, he said that it would depend on the availability of adequate service development money in 2010-11. I wonder whether the current Minister has any better information to report on that important subject. The report's ninth recommendation stated that a regional implementation group should be established to oversee completion of those recommendations. Has that group been established? What progress can it report?

As has been mentioned earlier in the debate, in June 2011, the all-party parliamentary osteoporosis group at Westminster produced a report into the role of nutrition in preventing the condition and promoting bone health. The report makes a number of recommendations, which deal mainly with healthy eating, exercise, weight watching, not smoking, and moderate alcohol consumption. It also recommends early education in schools to alert young people to the problem of unhealthy bone structure.

The National Osteoporosis Society also produced a paper entitled 'Protecting Fragile Bones: A Strategy to Reduce the Impact of Osteoporosis and Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland'. That report contains very useful information that could prevent, or certainly reduce, the incidence of osteoporosis. The society has asked that the Executive tackle public awareness by funding a sustained public health campaign throughout Northern Ireland to alert everyone to what can be done to prevent the onset of osteoporosis. Therefore, everyone, including health authorities and trusts, must work together. They have the information and, hopefully, the methods that are needed to reduce osteoporosis throughout Northern Ireland. Let us hope that we have the Department's support and will see vast improvements.

I was delighted to see the Minister in the Long Gallery on the evening when the National Osteoporosis Society was there. I was unable to remain long enough to hear what he had to say. I am sure that when he responds to the debate, he will indicate how he and the Executive can move forward to prevent osteoporosis throughout society.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. It aims to place emphasis on measures to prevent fractures that result from osteoporosis. The issue affects many people in Northern Ireland. Indeed, as has been mentioned, it is estimated that 72,000 people have the disease in this country. A lot of good work has been undertaken by the Minister on the issue, and I commend him on that. However, as with any health issue, work can always be done to improve healthcare and outcomes for the people whom we represent. The fact is that osteoporosis is often associated with older people. Much work can be done at an early age to reduce the impact and extent of the disease later in life.

3.15 pm

The motion refers to improving health outcomes, and one of the most effective ways of doing that is through positive lifestyle choices. Encouraging and promoting healthier lifestyles can realistically be achieved. The Minister has made promoting healthier lifestyles a central priority, and I trust that that work will continue and develop in the future. Reducing excessive alcohol consumption, stopping smoking and eating a more balanced diet are practical and cost-effective measures that can have a real and lasting impact on improved health. They can also help to prevent the risk of broken bones. The benefit of a public awareness campaign is that it can be tailored and targeted to have an impact on everyone in our society, young and old. Promoting good bone health should be a central feature of future public awareness campaigns.

It was recognised in a recent Westminster report that vegetarians are at risk. I want to register my concern about the Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee. He is a well-known vegetarian and he is at risk. What he needs is a good feed of County Down beef.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: With pleasure.

Mr Wells: I speak on behalf of the two vegetarian Assembly Members, myself and the honourable Member for Strangford —

Mr Agnew: Three.

Mr Wells: Three Members: healthy specimens all. Far from being frail and ill, we vegetarians live an average seven years longer than you carnivores. That is seven more years after you folks have long since departed this mortal coil. What the Member said was nonsense. The healthiest lifestyle choice that anyone can make is to avoid meat and cholesterol cocktails.

Mr Dunne: It just seems that you have seven years longer. *[Laughter.]* Jim, you have been warned.

Education in our schools can be a useful tool in promoting healthier lifestyles. That is one practical measure that should be used to help to improve public awareness and understanding of osteoporosis. Fracture Liaison Services is another example of an effective practical measure, which helps to tackle the problem of osteoporosis. It offers a vital service and helps to identify symptoms of the disease. It also ensures that patients are offered the correct treatment.

I was contacted recently by a North Down constituent who was diagnosed with osteoporosis some 13 years ago. He

told me that thanks to the knowledge that he had gained through the National Osteoporosis Society, he was able to be proactive and get DXA scans. He was also able to receive preventative treatment to avoid bone deterioration and to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

With an ageing population in the UK, reducing risk must remain a central theme in our health service. A fall can have a devastating effect on our older people, and it can often be a catalyst for further health deterioration. It can result in an increased burden being placed on carers and the health service. It can also totally demoralise the person who falls and destroy his or her independence.

A range of measures can be taken to further enhance how we tackle osteoporosis. Any measures that can improve early diagnosis of the disease, help to reduce suffering and, ultimately, save lives should be prioritised. I support the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Committee motion. At the outset, I declare that I am not a vegetarian, just in case anyone was wondering.

As has been stated, osteoporosis is a chronic progressive skeletal disorder, which is characterised by low bone mass and which results in an increase in bone rigidity and susceptibility to fracture. As was also stated, the number of people with osteoporosis will increase as the population ages. Taking into account the estimate that the elderly population here will have doubled by 2020, there is no doubt that osteoporosis is an increasing problem and that it needs to be dealt with sooner rather than later.

In reading through some of the research on osteoporosis, I was interested to learn that those who live in nursing or residential homes have a three times higher risk of a hip fracture than the general population. No particular reason was given for that, but I assume that a higher percentage of those in residential care have dementia and other similar conditions and that those conditions may lead to falls. I also learned that the mortality rate associated with hip fractures is very high. Ten per cent of hip fracture patients will be dead within one month of their injury and 30% die within a year. On a personal note, my mother fractured her hip when she was in her late 90s but because of very good care in the Royal Victoria Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital, she is very much alive and well at the age of 102, going on 103, and she has a very good quality of life. With good care and aftercare, it is possible to maintain that quality of life in some cases for people who have had hip fractures.

There is a range of bone-protecting treatments, many of which are available on the National Health Service, which can reduce by up to 50% a person's chances of sustaining a fracture. However, much more needs to be done, in the educational sense, about the problems and causes of osteoporosis. There is no doubt that preventing the development of osteoporosis with early detection and treatment will reduce the number of fragility fractures here. Osteoporosis can be prevented by building strong bones in childhood and adult years and ensuring adequate treatment when detected. For many people, the condition is not detected until they sustain a fracture, so early diagnosis and treatment is essential.

It has been recommended that the following need to be in place: greater public awareness of risk factors; a high

quality fracture service; a fracture liaison service for the prevention of secondary problems; information to support quality care and prevention services; services to promote early detection and treatment; and effective medicines management for patients with osteoporosis and fragility fractures.

As my colleague Michelle Gildernew said earlier, medicines can be taken to prevent fragility fractures. Some are difficult to take and they are not suitable for everyone, but compared to the £20,000 cost of treating someone who breaks a hip, prevention is obviously much cheaper in the long run. As has been mentioned, a lot of people who live here — 72,000 — have osteoporosis. That will carry on increasing because of the increase in the people who are living longer but not necessarily more healthily.

I ask the Minister to consider all the issues that have been raised and to look at the matter as a priority. In the future, the way in which our elderly people are treated will be one of the major issues that the health service will have to deal with.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the debate and thank the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety for tabling the motion. The difficulty in being further down the speaking list is that all the statistics have been well and truly used up. By now, there can be no one who does not know that there are 72,000 people in Northern Ireland who suffer from the disease of osteoporosis.

Like Kieran McCarthy, I had the privilege of attending the National Osteoporosis Society's twenty-fifth anniversary event in the Long Gallery last week. I stayed to the bitter end and got the opportunity to hear from the Minister. I have no doubt that he will outline some of the comments that he made for the benefit of Members who were not present at the event.

The key phrase in all this is: osteoporosis is a disease. It is not just a disability. Having a disease means that there are physical and emotional aspects to it. There is no doubt that although some people who suffer physically have the ability to get about easily, others cannot do so because they have very brittle bones and are unable to move with the same ease. Although there are people who can cope with the emotional aspect of the disease and get on with their lives, there are people who find it difficult to cope with the emotion and the pain that they have to endure.

Many Members have gone through the statistics, so I will pass on that. However, it is important that no matter how people who suffer from osteoporosis feel and how much they suffer, they want to know that something is being done to help them.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. I know where he is coming from: he is at the end of the long list of Members to speak and is struggling to get through. The Member was at the meeting the other evening when the gentleman presented his case. If I had had the time, I would have told Members about that gentleman's experience and, to finish off, what age he said he was, if the Member can recall.

Mr I McCrea: I may sound as though I am struggling. I have plenty to say but am finding it difficult not to use the statistics that everybody else has used because I do not want to repeat what has been said.

It is worth mentioning the gentleman who was present at the meeting. He took it upon himself to find out that he had osteoporosis, not, in the first instance, with help from his doctor. Nonetheless, he did it himself. However, he lives a very active life. I cannot recall everything that he did but he is over 80 years of age and did things such as going down off aeroplanes. If I look as good as he does when I reach 40, I will be happy enough. There is no doubt that people such as that gentleman have the ability to cope physically and emotionally, but there are those who are unable to do so.

I thank the Health Minister for coming here today, and I look forward to hearing his response, especially on how he intends to implement the nine recommendations of 'The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland' report.

As we approach Christmas, like most Members, I look forward to sitting down to a juicy turkey. We have now found out that three Members will be sitting down to vegetables, and I can assure Members that I will not be thinking of them as I enjoy the juicy pieces of turkey. However, because of the wintry and icy conditions, some people who suffer from osteoporosis and experience falls will, unfortunately, spend time at home or in hospital. We need to remember that.

There is no doubt that plenty more can be done. This is obviously the start of a debate, certainly in the House, and I ask the Minister not only to listen to Members' comments and to pay heed to reports but to take action to ensure that people who suffer from osteoporosis can benefit from early intervention and diagnosis to give them a better life as they move into their later years.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Chair of the Health Committee for tabling the motion. I am not a member of the Health Committee, but I am very pleased to speak today because osteoporosis led to the death of my father. When he was in his late 70s, his back collapsed while he was swimming. He subsequently had five extremely uncomfortable years during which the pain in his back and the associated difficulties led to him having strokes and, eventually, to his death. I do not want to be morbid, but the issue is very personal to me. It is not just a female disease. It is a disease that we all need to be aware of, and, sadly, I am told that it is hereditary.

Members have heard a lot of the statistics on the dangers, and we know that fractures constitute a large part of health expenditure. Various statistics demonstrate that a severe fracture may result in as many as 26 or 27 days in a hospital bed.

When we think of the numbers of beds that are lost to people with fractures, we need to think of those statistics.

3.30 pm

The motion wants us to talk about measures to prevent fractures in older people, and that comes down to better care and better and earlier diagnosis. We should be looking at companies, such as Radox in Crumlin, that have diagnostic skills, so that people know when they have osteoporosis and can ensure that they take the right action from then on. As we heard in this morning's health statement, more pressure will be put on GPs. We need to ensure that we train GPs so that they can advise accordingly.

We also know from the statement that more elderly people will be cared for at home. When I heard that and linked it to this debate, I thought that the devil is in the detail. If you read the statistics one way, it appears that 25% of accidents occurred while elderly people were in a care home. That means that 75% of fractures happen in the home. Therefore, we have to have a very good awareness or education for everyone so that they know how to prepare their homes for elderly people so that they do not fall down the stairs, slip on a slippery floor and so that families do not leave a bar of soap on the floor. You could go on with many things such as that. We need to think of how we make people aware and, especially, how we look after elderly people so that they do not slip and break a bone.

In Antrim on Saturday, out of just 40 people at a Christmas fair, two were osteoporosis sufferers. I pass on their main comment to me to the Minister: please look at the side effects of the medicine. They were both surprised when they were found to have osteoporosis and they have been taking the medicines that they have been given. However, they say that the side effects are awful. The Minister has just gone out the Door, so I hope that someone will take that on board and make him aware of it.

We must concentrate not only on elderly people but on young people. As others said, it is about bringing everyone up with a well-balanced diet. I praise the National Osteoporosis Society for its lengthy document in nice big writing on how to look after your bones. A large part of that is diet and part of it is care and exercise.

I also nudge the councils, probably through the Environment Minister, to ensure that they carry on funding the citizens' groups. It is the funding of those citizens' groups, such as the Newtownabbey senior citizens' group, with their exercise classes and the other things that they put in place, that keeps senior citizens able to go to those events. We need to look at transport and ensure that everything is available for them. Also falling on the councils is the fact that, in many cases, it will be them that need to advise people on how to prepare their houses and look after elderly people in their areas. We need to look forward to the exercise regimes, aerobic training — you can see that I do lots of that but am not quite there — and progressive resistance training. *[Interruption.]* Thank you.

Do not forget the young. Osteoporosis might be an older person's disease but it can affect young people, and the point about diet is important. I searched through the document looking for words of comfort. I would love to know about the diet of the mother who is still living at 102. I bet you that it was not vegetarian. When I read through the document, I find that calcium is the key. If you look through the various messages —

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

Mr Kinahan: We need to look after our diet, and we need to look after ourselves. Therefore, I ask the Minister to ensure that we have early diagnosis, that we educate everyone —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Kinahan: — and that, right at the bottom of it, we look at how we look after families to look after elderly people.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As a member of the Health Committee, I support the motion and I thank the Chair of the Committee for tabling it. A lot of what I wanted to say has been said, and like Mr McCrea, I will try not to go over a lot of statistics. If I am struggling, I am sure that Kieran will help me out.

More can be done, as has been said, to prevent fractures. To do so costs little but is effective, and most of the treatments can be got on the NHS. Savings can be made in the long term if the proper funding is made available to ensure that fractures are prevented in the first place.

I thank the Osteoporosis Society for providing us with a lot of information for the debate. Its research tells us that over the next 25 years, hospital admissions for hip fractures here and in England will increase by 96%. The number of hospital admissions and the spend on aftercare will affect our own Health Department.

I come from the west, which is an area where identifying, accessing and prescribing bone-protecting treatments is most at risk. Unlike other trust areas, we do not have a fracture liaison service and support nurse. Throughout the North, only a number of trusts provide fracture liaison services, and the Belfast service is an example of best practice. So there are some inequalities between trust areas.

As Members said, a high number of people who break bones go on to develop osteoporosis and most have to wait in pain for years for a diagnosis. The fragility fracture working group made a number of recommendations, which have also been spoken about in the House. Its recommendations include having a public awareness campaign, which I think is the most prevalent need. We need to promote bone health for those most at risk and others. Another recommendation is to ensure that all trust areas have a fracture liaison service in place for secondary prevention of fractures. That needs to be established in all trusts. We hear that significant work is ongoing between the Public Health Agency and the trusts but we need to implement those recommendations, Minister. However, the ongoing work must be welcomed.

When an older person suffers a fracture, a clear pathway should be in place for them to prevent future falls. That is not always the case in some areas and in some trusts. Support and information on osteoporosis should also be given not just to individual sufferers but to their families. Again, as was said, osteoporosis does not affect just the elderly, it affects young people, as it is genetic and hereditary. Indeed, I have a niece who has had osteoporosis all her young adult life, so I know too well the problems that osteoporosis presents to her and others. She has had to make some life-changing decisions around her lifestyle, mobility and work.

I am sure that I am supported across the House when I call on the Minister to heed the motion. I want to reiterate my thanks to the Osteoporosis Society for the excellent research paper that it gave us for the debate.

Ms P Bradley: Like my colleague Mr McCrea and Ms Boyle, I will keep my contribution short, probably much shorter. I have scored many things off as we have gone. That is what happens when you speak last in a debate, and I will not go through all those statistics again but, as a member of the Health Committee, I also support the motion.

I, like many other Members here, attended the Osteoporosis Society's twenty-fifth anniversary last week in Parliament Buildings, albeit I did not stay for the full time, so I did not hear it all. However, I know that the focus of the event was prevention and identifying those at risk for the fracture liaison service in order that they obtain an early diagnosis of osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis is extremely common, with an average of 8,000 people in each Assembly constituency suffering through poor bone health. During my employment in the Northern Trust, I witnessed the impact of fragility fractures and their devastating effect on the patient. Unless any of us have had some sort of debilitating illness, we cannot begin to imagine the emotional impact of loss of independence. For some, that may be an inability to drive or go shopping but many will require assistance at a higher level with basic daily living activities such as feeding, washing, dressing and even toileting needs. That loss of dignity can have a direct impact on mental health and can lead to anxiety, depression or even suicide. There is also a great impact on families, especially if they have to resume the role of carer, which, as we know through having discussed it many times, is the most difficult job, and one that has little or no support.

The cost to our health and social care service is also a major point. As has been said, in Northern Ireland, 4,700 patients presented to hospital with hip fractures in 2007-08 at a cost of £120 million. Those costs also include rehabilitation services for inpatients and at home, step-down beds, social care needs and, for some, permanent care. As has been said many times in debates in the Chamber, the emphasis should be on prevention and early diagnosis. The Assembly should be supporting the prevention and management of fragility fractures and should raise awareness of how, through health promotion, we can take care of bone health from an early age. We need to encourage our health trusts to improve outcomes through the fracture liaison service. I support the motion.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion that has been debated today and I thank Members for raising this important issue. This has been a day of revelations: the Chair of the Committee revealed that she has not quite reached 45 yet. I am not sure if I should have an investigation of whether that is accurate. Mr McCrea revealed that he has not reached 40 yet. Meanwhile, Mr Brady's mother has reached the grand age of 102. However, he did not reveal whether she had received the telegram from Her Majesty. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Brady: No comment. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Poots: I will reveal that I understand calcium to be very good for your bones. It can help to offset and to prevent osteoporosis. I also understand that vitamin D, through sunshine, can help. So, if you find me lying at a poolside drinking milkshakes and eating ice cream, I am engaging in prevention. That will be my effort to ensure that I will not get osteoporosis.

However, this is a serious issue and the debate comes at an opportune time. In this Building last Monday, I spoke at a reception to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the National Osteoporosis Society. At that event, I met representatives of the society and people with osteoporosis,

which gave me the chance to gain some further insight into what it is to live with this condition and to learn about the extensive range of work being undertaken by the society.

The condition of osteoporosis can strike at any age, although as Ms Boyle pointed out, it is probably most associated with older people and women in particular. Preventing the development of osteoporosis, along with its early detection and treatment, is a key challenge. As our population ages and lives longer, it will become more prevalent.

The statistics about our ageing population provide a context for this challenge. Since mid-2007, the number of citizens in the UK of state-pensionable age has exceeded the number of people aged 16 or under. In Northern Ireland, for example, the estimated number of people aged 16 and under is 406,000, and the projected number of people aged 65 and over is 439,000. I do not think that Mr Wells falls into that category just yet — he looks so much younger because he is a vegetarian.

Over the next 20 years, the number of people aged over 85 will more than double. As people live longer, they are more likely to develop a long-term condition and have more need of health and social care services. As our population changes, we must ensure that our services are focused on promoting good health as well as preventative and early intervention initiatives. It is estimated that almost three million people in the UK have osteoporosis, which equates to around 72,000 in Northern Ireland.

The reduced bone density and weakness caused by osteoporosis can and does lead to a higher risk of fragility fractures. That is an awful disablement for people. Many people break bones easily, and that can result in huge consequences. For example, there are 300,000 fractures in the UK each year, and 1,150 people die each month as a result of hip fractures. That drives home the significance of the issue and the real damage that it can cause. The principal cause of accidental death and injury around the home is falls. In 2009, 114 deaths were attributed to accidents in the home, of which just over half, 58, were due to falls. Of those fatal falls, 59% involved people aged 65 or over.

3.45 pm

A fragility fracture can cause significant pain and distress and can affect a person's confidence and ability to live independently in their own home and community. Therefore, preventing or minimising the effects of osteoporosis will be instrumental in reducing the number of fragility fractures. It is, therefore, crucial that more people with osteoporosis be supported to reduce the risk of fragility fractures and helped to manage their conditions safely at home.

The HSC Board has undertaken a range of actions relevant to assisting with osteoporosis. For example, a report by the fragility fracture working group, 'The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland', was published in June 2009. The report made a number of recommendations, including greater public awareness of how to keep bones healthy, effective falls management services, effective medicines management, supporting GPs in direct enhanced services for secondary prevention, an information infrastructure to ensure high-quality services for patients, and a fracture liaison service in all trusts.

Ms Gildernew: Will the Minister elaborate on the fact that in April 2012, there will be a shift, with more responsibility for fracture prevention going to GPs? In identifying high-risk elderly people, those people need a dual energy X-ray absorptiometry scan, and my understanding is that we do not have the ability to do the number of scans that might be required. Will planning be done to enable people in the high-risk category to have the adequate bone density scan and, therefore, get preventative medication to help them to prevent falls in future?

Mr Poots: The issue of DXA scans is one that we can look at. It is a specific type of scan, and we, therefore, need to have the appropriate level of scanners available. That might not be the case as things stand. We will seek to ascertain that for the Member. Ms Boyle also raised the fragility fractures liaison service in the west. Three trusts have it. It was planned in Altnagelvin for October this year. The fragility fractures and bone health group is taking forward the recommendations of the 2009 report, with the intention of ensuring that they are all fulfilled. The Altnagelvin one was due to happen last month, but if it has not, we will see where that is and come back to you on the issue.

Progress is also being made in many of the areas that I previously referred to. To that end, the HSC Board and the Public Health Agency are working together to progress the recommendations. A regional fragility fractures and bone health implementation group is being established to do that. It will be led by the Public Health Agency and will include a range of stakeholders from across the statutory, independent and voluntary sectors. The group will meet early in 2012 to agree a work plan for implementing the recommendations of the report. In the health and social care system, a number of initiatives have already been put in place to help with osteoporosis and those at risk of bone fractures.

Falls prevention schemes for older people and dedicated falls clinics have been established to assess those at high risk of fall fractures or with a history of falling. Those schemes include education and lifestyle advice that can equip people with osteoporosis with the knowledge, confidence and skills that they need to understand and manage their condition as effectively as possible. The advice includes information on adequate nutrition to maintain good bone health, support to stop smoking and to reduce alcohol intake to reduce the risks of osteoporosis, the importance of regular weight-bearing exercise, footwear, home safety and falls prevention.

The Public Health Agency has been instrumental in supporting other initiatives aimed at preventing or minimising the effects of osteoporosis and improving health and well-being. These include Walking the Way to Health, healthy weight and nutrition and the promotion of good bone health, Cycling for Health, the physical activity strategy Be Active, Be Healthy and the active families programme. In the past two years, PHA has also supported the development of physical activity guidelines for different age groups to enhance bone and muscular development from an earlier age and to help the prevention of osteoporosis.

A recent review of the home accident prevention strategy stated that progress is being made on reducing accidental injuries in the home but that there is still a need to prioritise falls prevention. The new home accident prevention strategy

will be developed and taken forward soon. The drafting group is to be chaired by the chief environmental health officer and will include a wide range of stakeholders. It met for the first time in November, and a new strategy should be launched for consultation in 2012. While that is being developed, the Public Health Agency has established an interim regional group to oversee actions on home accident prevention. Funding of £300,000 has been made available to support PHA in that work.

Much of the approach to the treatment and care of people with osteoporosis is based on the concept of self-management and helping people with long-term conditions. Supporting self-management for adults living with long-term conditions is a key theme of the draft policy, which stresses the importance of information and education in helping people to take control.

My Department is developing a service framework policy for the health and well-being of older people, which is due to launch for public consultation in 2012. The framework will include standards in relation to person-centred care and, in particular, conditions more common to older people. There will be standards relating to falls, specifically the prevention of falls, screening in primary care, and falls presenting to intermediate or secondary care.

I trust that I have covered a wide range of activity that the Department and its bodies are progressing. We will continue to liaise with the National Osteoporosis Society and others as we develop our responses to the condition, which can be so detrimental, particularly for our older population.

Mr Wells: I apologise that I was not here for the early part of the debate. A report that was issued this morning has attracted particular interest. Most members of the Health Committee have been doing interviews and commenting on it.

It is clear from the debate that osteoporosis can be a devastating condition. When people with osteoporosis sustain a fracture, the result is often substantial disability, pain, reduced quality of life and, ultimately, a shortened lifespan. I hope that it has been made clear through the contributions of Health Committee members and other MLAs that the House takes the issue of osteoporosis very seriously. We are all aware that budgets are extremely tight. However, preventing fractures will save the health service hundreds of thousands of pounds in the long term, as well as saving people with osteoporosis from the suffering often associated with breaking a hip or wrist.

Statistics show that the number of hip fractures has increased in the past 10 years and beyond, and given our ageing population, the numbers will only go up unless we act now. It is an area of our health service in which good public health messages and early diagnosis and treatment at primary care level can make a difference to people's outcomes. I urge the Minister to continue the work that he has begun to tackle those issues.

There were quite a few very useful contributions in this wide-ranging debate. As I said, I was not in for the first two contributions. However, I have notes on the comments made by Pam Lewis, who was the first of many Members to quote the shocking statistic that there are 72,000 people in Northern Ireland with osteoporosis. She welcomed the new service framework and highlighted the report of the fragility fractures working group and asked the Minister

to explain what steps had been taken to implement his recommendation. Mr McCarthy also raised that point.

Sam Gardiner was the first to raise the issue of the increasing number of hip fractures and their devastating impact on people's life chances. I speak from personal experience as my late mother-in-law suffered from the condition. Mr Gardiner emphasised the importance of prevention and said that people need education on how to keep their bones healthy. He also spoke about the role of the fracture liaison service and said that one was needed in all the trusts. Michaela Boyle and several others made the point that it is absolutely essential that that service be available in all five trusts in Northern Ireland. She also said that there is an urgent need to train GPs to a standard at which they can play a greater role in diagnosing osteoporosis.

Mr McCarthy also said that 72,000 people in Northern Ireland have osteoporosis and talked about the need for the fracture liaison service to be available in each trust. He asked what progress had been made on the 2009 report and whether a group had been established to oversee it.

We then come to Mr Mickey Brady. When I hear him speaking, I think of three great mysteries of this planet: what happened to the crew of the *Mary Celeste*? Who shot JR? And is Mickey Brady's hair real? *[Laughter.]* There has been great speculation in the Chamber as to the nature of Mr Brady's hair. I am sure that he would like to take the opportunity at some stage to intervene not only to reassure us that his mother lives to the ripe old age of 102 — I see her picture regularly in the local newspapers celebrating those important birthdays — but to tell us whether being far from follicularly challenged grows in the family.

Mr Brady mentioned the increasingly ageing population, the fact that a person is three times more likely to have a fall in residential care, and that although there is treatment available for osteoporosis, more needs to be done in prevention.

We then had a scurrilous contribution from Mr Gordon Dunne the honourable Member for North Down who impugned the integrity of all the decent, law-abiding vegetarians of this planet. He sees three fine specimens of manhood in the Chamber who are themselves vegetarians. To think that Mr Agnew is 59 — look how well he is preserved because he is a vegetarian. I am reminded of a constituent who came to see me in Downpatrick five years ago and said that he was having terrible problems with his neighbour. He said to me, "Jim, she is an absolute lunatic. She is mad. I will tell you how mad she is: she is a vegetarian."

I can assure you that we vegetarians are not mad. We are healthy and there is absolutely no link between the vegetarian lifestyle and problems of osteoporosis. The important thing is the level of calcium, Mr Dunne, rather than the level of cholesterol in one's blood. Therefore, I refute entirely the scurrilous comment made by Mr Dunne. It is amazing how you go off people so quickly. However, he supported the motion and he wants fracture liaison services, which are essential, in every area.

Mr Mark H Durkan also supported the motion. He was shocked by the number of people suffering from osteoporosis and he indicated that fracture liaison services have enabled early diagnosis of the condition and limited

the pain suffered by patients. As Ms Boyle pointed out, it is important that that is made available equally to everyone throughout Northern Ireland.

I see that Mr Brady still has not risen to make the intervention that I requested earlier.

Mr Durkan said that it must be ensured that anyone treated for fractures is tested for osteoporosis.

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes, I certainly will. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Brady: I feel obliged to comment because, as the Member is well aware, as I came down the stairs a couple of weeks ago, he nearly pulled the hair off my head just to check it. So it is real, I assure you.

Mr Wells: I am relieved to hear that. It is quite a remarkable assemblage of hair, I must say.

Danny Kinahan told us that he was working out and doing various exercises: we believe you. On a more serious level, he said that he had very direct personal experience of osteoporosis, as a close relative of his spent 26 days in hospital as a result of a fracture. Let me be serious: that indicates that when someone with osteoporosis falls, in addition to the considerable pain to the patient, the cost to the health service can be very high. Therefore, early interventions can have a dramatic impact, on the quality of life and in savings to the health service.

Many Members said that many fractures were happening in the home and that families need to know how to make homes safer for older people.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Member for giving way. My mother suffers from osteoporosis. At 83, she is fairly fit apart from that. It is not only actions in the home that matter, it is actions, full stop. My mother could break a bone simply by knocking against something. Another concern that I have is access to fracture clinics. You have to travel a very long journey to get that damage corrected. Certainly, actions in the home are a major issue, but incidents can happen as simple as knocking your arm against a chair.

I did not mean to interrupt the Member in mid-flow nor did I mean for him to get his hair ruffled.

Mr Wells: I can assure you that my hair is real as well.

Mr Kinahan introduced a new element to the debate that had been overlooked: the problems of the side effects of medication for osteoporosis. He said that there needs to be funding for exercise groups for senior citizens, which I thought was an interesting comment.

It was very useful to have Paula Bradley's contribution, as she comes directly, within the past few months, from the health service. She described her experience of dealing with patients with osteoporosis.

We had more scurrilous comments from Mr Ian McCrea about vegetarians. He also supported the motion and he raised an interesting additional point about the mental suffering, as well as the physical, felt by those with osteoporosis, as they often find themselves restricted to their homes and limited in the areas to which they can travel

and walk. They have a fear that if they fall, it could be very serious indeed.

That was an interesting and novel point. The Member thanked the Minister for attending the event. Unfortunately, I could not attend the event in the Long Gallery that Monday afternoon, but I wish that I had been present because, clearly, Members found it useful to listen to those who suffer from osteoporosis.

4.00 pm

Mrs Boyle raised the issue of inequalities in treatment, diagnosis and testing for osteoporosis, and I welcome the Minister's comment that progress is being made in the introduction of those much-needed services at Altnagelvin.

We heard comments from the Minister, who, once again, showed his commitment to those who have the condition. It has been an exceptionally busy day for all of us in the Health Committee, and we welcome the fact that he was able to attend and to give an up-to-date position.

Finally, I wish to place on record my thanks to all who are involved in the field of osteoporosis for taking time to provide information to Members on this condition. We would have been unable to have such an intelligent debate today without the valuable information that was provided to us all. It shows the benefit of having a very vibrant NGO charitable sector in the health service in Northern Ireland. Groups are going out of their way to make certain that the needs of people who suffer from the condition — we are talking about 70,000 people — are well articulated. They must feel that they have done a very good job today.

It is clear that the motion will be passed without any dissent, and we hope that we can look back in two or three years' time and say that the treatment and care of people who have the condition will have been advanced by taking this time on 13 December 2011 to air the concerns, difficulties and worries of people who have osteoporosis.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I apologise to anyone who is follicularly challenged.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place an emphasis on measures to prevent fractures resulting from osteoporosis in older people, aimed at helping to improve their health outcomes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a moment.

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

Private Members' Business

Payday Loans

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

Mr McQuillan: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the number of companies that are offering short-term payday loans to people who require additional money to make ends meet before their next payday; and calls on the Executive to engage with Her Majesty's Government and the Financial Services Authority to ensure fair interest rates and protection for people taking such loans.

I wish to put on record my thanks to the Business Committee for giving us the opportunity to raise this important matter. I am sure that many Members will be aware of the number of advertisements on television and radio promoting payday loans. The sector was worth £7.5 billion to the UK economy in 2008, which is highly significant, and I am sure that many will agree that it has been at the expense of some of the most vulnerable people.

Payday loans are short-term loans offered by various companies to help applicants meet a shortfall until they get paid. They are particularly short-term, and, if consumers are unable to pay back the loan within a designated period, they risk being further penalised with excessive fees. Many payday loans are lent on the basis of extortionate interest rates, some with APRs of between 1,000% and 5,000%, which would be 10 times the amount initially borrowed if the borrower were to pay off the debt one year after they were granted the loan. Those rates represent extortion, to say the least. Those companies are legal loan sharks. One could compare payday loans to a scheme that was on offer a year ago, cash for gold. It offered a means of securing cash quickly and conveniently. These companies prey on the vulnerable and disadvantaged who, in hard times, are desperate.

Many people who resort to payday loans are likely to be unable to secure assistance from their bank. Such assistance is likely to be an overdraft, an extension to an existing overdraft, a loan or a credit card. Furthermore, consumers without a bank account are also likely to seek a payday loan as it is their only means of securing credit. Shockingly, approximately 3% of the population still do not have a bank account. That seriously hinders their ability to manage their money effectively and puts them in the position of living hand to mouth. Consumers without a bank account are reflected by the number of cheque-cashing shops seen on the high street, especially in low-income and disadvantaged areas. That puts them in a very difficult position in obtaining legal forms of credit, and, therefore, they resort to desperate measures. I, like, I am sure, many others in the House, have seen people in despair.

Those people have no money and are not sure what to do, especially as we approach Christmas, when people feel much is expected of them, despite having to cope with other soaring costs, including fuel for the car, home heating oil, electricity, food and groceries.

In recent years, consumer credit companies that supply credit cards or loans have been brought into the public light and held to account for their business practices. There have been successful cases taken against such companies and rulings made in favour of consumers. That has led to more transparency in the banking system, whereby lenders have to provide a summary of fees and interest rates, in addition to making the rights of the consumer clear. In some cases, we have also seen fees reduced and consumers being offered a cooling-off period. Payday loans, however, seem to defy the odds and subject the consumer to harsh terms and extortionate borrowing rates.

Recently, the issue has been looked into by Her Majesty's Treasury. One idea floated has been the introduction of a cap on borrowing costs in order to protect vulnerable consumers. However, that has been ruled out by the Tory-led Government in London. The Westminster Government fear that, if we hinder and limit the business of such lending companies, we could see vulnerable consumers being unable to access any credit, as the only products they can access at present are those with high interest rates. It is feared that, if vulnerable consumers cannot access legitimate means of borrowing, they will resort to illegal forms of borrowing.

Comparison tools are nothing new and offer a way of securing the best deals. I am keen to promote shopping around for whatever you are looking for. However, many consumers looking for credit fail to know their chances of securing a particular form of credit or what chance they have of securing a particularly competitive APR. Those who apply may be fortunate in securing a product; others will be guaranteed use of a product but with a higher interest rate than that advertised. Those applying for other products who have been knocked back or offered an alternative high-price product may then apply for another product, not knowing that they risk damaging their chances further by applying for multiple products.

In the current climate, it is important that we protect the most vulnerable, and I welcome the numerous initiatives that have been launched by the Executive to assist those facing hard times. It is vital that the Assembly, through the Executive, sees that constituents in this part of the United Kingdom are protected from abuse by those who are out to exploit the vulnerable and make money out of them. I urge those with money problems to speak to someone. Many charities and organisations are willing to help, regardless of an individual's social status or circumstances.

I look forward to today's debate. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will read from something about payday loans that I cut out of the paper yesterday. This is a letter from a constituent, not here, but in the United Kingdom. It states:

"Despite working full-time, my wages were low, and I ended up taking out six pay day loans. None was for luxuries, just household utilities and rent. I paid three back on time, but the other three have threatened legal

action, because their interest rates mean I owe £2,300 for borrowing a total of £850. I wish the Government would change the law to cap those rates."

Today, I received correspondence from the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions. It says that new data published in the UK shows that 3.5 million adults are considering taking out a payday loan over the next six months. That is a very scary statistic. The Ulster Federation of Credit Unions believes that the credit union movement can provide a real alternative and direct competition to payday loans. I suggest that people who are considering payday loans check out their local credit union.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support and welcome the motion. It is a timely discussion, given not just our current financial climate but the fact that we are in the run-up to Christmas, which is when people are more likely to avail themselves of finances to try to provide luxuries for their family. The Member who spoke previously referred to essential goods, but there is huge consumer pressure on people to provide items for their family at this time of the year. That makes them more susceptible to the sort of people who provide the loans. Whether they are legal or whether they suffer from a lack of regulation, the approach of some companies is certainly very unscrupulous. Therefore, the debate is timely.

Whenever companies advertise loans to help people make ends meet until the next payday, the reality is that, for most people, that day is when the next benefit cheque arrives. That is simply their payday. With some interest rates at over 200%, it is clear that those activities are nothing short of legalised loan sharking. The proposer of the motion said that they exploit some of the most vulnerable.

The Assembly has little power or authority to take action against these practices as they operate here. It is incumbent on organisations such as the Consumer Council and the Financial Services Authority to look into imposing a cap on the rates that can be applied in these circumstances. I was not surprised to hear the proposer of the motion say that the current coalition Government have expressed some opposition to that. In fact, many of their policies are driving people to avail themselves of those facilities. Therefore, in a sense, there is an irony in the motion petitioning the Government to deal with a problem that their austerity policies have largely contributed to. Nonetheless, that is where the power and responsibility lie, and we should do everything in our power to highlight the situation and to petition those who have responsibility to take action.

The motion specifies that this practice is a recent emergence. However, companies have been involved in it for some time and have charged interest rates of 190% and more. As we said, it is particularly prevalent in the run-up to Christmas, when companies know that people are under a certain amount of consumer and financial pressure. I am sure that Members and others will agree with me that, in the absence of proper regulation, people should be very careful of starting to use these opportunistic lenders. They should try to resist that temptation, and, if they are forced into a loan arrangement, it should be after very careful study of the fine print that governs that arrangement so that they can ensure that they are not susceptible, as was said, to exorbitant interest as the result of a failure to repay.

In the meantime, although there is an acceptance that the power to deal with the issue does not lie with us here, it is incumbent on us to highlight the issues that arise and to ensure that we press those who have a responsibility to take action. I do not think that we should accept the view of the coalition Government in London. More can be done, and the Government have a responsibility to do it. We must continue to press them to regulate the companies that operate in that vein so that we can protect the most vulnerable from what are, essentially, predatory lending activities. I congratulate those who tabled the motion. We support it, and we hope that, in highlighting the issue, we add some pressure on those who have a role in the matter to take action.

Mr Nesbitt: I am pleased to speak to the motion, and I congratulate those who tabled it. It is a critical issue, especially for Northern Ireland. It is not just me saying that: I base that on empirical research from the Consumer Council and its 2005 baseline survey of financial capability. It looked at five core competences, and the people of Northern Ireland were found to be behind the rest of the United Kingdom in at least three. Those competences were planning ahead, which was a major issue here; choosing products, where we are less capable than the rest of the UK; and staying informed of new products coming on to the market, where we also scored badly. In summary, the Consumer Council believes that we are not good at making prudent financial decisions. The research shows that that is particularly true of women. Payday loans could not be described as prudent financial decisions; they are necessary, perhaps, but not prudent. If anybody is in any doubt about the scale of the problem, one little modern measure is to go on to your computer and type "payday loan" in to Google. You get no fewer than 9.3 million references.

4.15 pm

The issue is easily defined. Four words cover it: rising costs, static wages. That is at the better end. At the worse end, it is rising costs and no wages, as the unemployment figures go north of 60,000 in Northern Ireland. A solution, however, is more difficult to identify. I have no difficulty in supporting the motion's call on the Executive to engage with the Government and the FSA to ensure fair interest rates and protections for people taking such loans. I would go a little further and make another call to the FSA: to clarify its commitment to the Money Advice Service (MAS) that operates in Northern Ireland. That service began life last year as the FSA's financial capability division and has morphed in a couple of phases into the Money Advice Service. Earlier this year, in this very Building, it launched a web-based survey for consumers. I and other MLAs were happy to support it, endorse it and promote it. However, what I hear now is that it is not as committed to Northern Ireland as it might well be. I assume that it is not for the lack of resource, as the chief executive of the Money Advice Service earns a salary of £250,000 per annum, which is well in excess of the Prime Minister's.

I was called by a constituent who alleged that the Money Advice Service was withdrawing its staff from Northern Ireland. I decided to check, and, on 28 November, I spoke to a representative — perhaps agent would be a better description — of the MAS, who gave me a rather complicated explanation but no satisfactory answer to my question. However, he promised to e-mail me. I waited

and waited. Yesterday, I began to phone. I phoned on four occasions: at 12.53 pm and 3.47 pm yesterday and at 9.24 am and 11.45 am today. On all four occasions, I was greeted by a recorded message that said, "Thank you for calling the Money Advice Service. Our opening hours are 8.30 am to 4.30 pm Monday to Friday". I am none the wiser as to the situation with the Money Advice Service. I call on it to clarify its position and make clear that it is not prepared to discriminate against the citizens of Northern Ireland compared with those in England, Scotland and Wales. It also needs to make clear that we have a level playing field and a level distribution of service to the people of Northern Ireland, who, judged on the baseline survey of financial capability that was conducted by the Northern Ireland Consumer Council, are most in need of that type of advice and service.

There is another call beyond calling on the Executive to engage with Her Majesty's Government and the FSA, and it is for the Assembly and Executive to address the fact that this is the only region of the United Kingdom that has not brought forward a strategy to address the relative weaknesses in the financial capability of our citizens. That is something that we can and should do. If we were to do that in-house, it would do a great service to the citizens of this country.

I call not only for support for the motion, which calls for fair interest rates and protection, but for the Executive to bring forward a strategy on financial capability and for the Money Advice Service to clarify its commitment to Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat: I thank the proposer of the motion. I was pleased that, towards the end of his speech, he mentioned the credit union movement, although he confined his remarks to the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions. For the history books, the credit union movement was started by two Presbyterian ministers in Germany 150 years ago. It spread to Nova Scotia, where it was taken up by fishermen. It came to Ireland in the early 1960s. I am very proud that my former party leader John Hume was involved in setting up hundreds of credit unions under the auspices of the Irish League of Credit Unions, which gave some help to the Ulster federation when it was setting up. That is the history over.

The motion is important in that it calls for regulation. The proposer was quite right to mention the credit unions, which he did at the end of his speech. We must be able to encourage people to look to the alternatives to the gombeen men who exploit people today, largely through the internet. When I was growing up in the 1960s, ordinary people were not welcome in the banks, so they did not know how to exploit people. Then, as now, people turned to loan sharks, who were probably working out of a suitcase or something like that. Payday loans had not yet arrived, but they are here now, and they are a problem. Equally, a lack of family budgeting has weakened many families.

The Assembly had a very positive relationship with the credit unions. Indeed, the Irish League of Credit Unions was very sad to hear the news that the Financial Services Authority is to take over next March. However, there is no reason why the Assembly should not continue that close relationship with the unions. The proper way to address the problem is to encourage credit unions to go into housing estates and onto the highways and byways to encourage people to become members. In that way, we can take

people away from the gombeen men and those who offer payday cheques. However, we can do that only if we appoint field officers, which is exactly what happened in England. Ironically, when the English discovered a few years ago that the Irish had a wonderful institution called the credit union movement, field officers were appointed for a fixed term and went out and sold the idea. I see no reason why that should not happen here. Indeed, given that we are in the economic doldrums, it seems only sensible that, rather than simply looking for regulation to curtail the excesses of loan sharks, payday people and so on, we should actually offer something positive.

Indeed, as someone who has been a member of the credit union movement all my life, I openly admit that I could not have survived without it, particularly when starting a family. So my sympathy goes out to people who are attracted by the offer of short-term loans or payday cheques only to discover, as the proposer said, that they then owe an astonishing amount.

The credit union movement, of course, does not simply offer realistic rates of interest but actually belongs to its members. It has an added advantage because people have an opportunity to run their credit union and acquire the entrepreneurial skills that everyone should have. Furthermore, at the end of the year, profits go back to members. On my borrowing this year, I got a 25% loan rebate, which means that for every £100 I borrowed, I got £25 back. I also got a 2% dividend on my meagre savings — I emphasise "meagre". However, those are the sorts of positive things that I hope will spin out from the debate on the motion, with which I am in total agreement. I hope that those in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment who read Hansard will realise that the relationship between the credit union movement, the Ulster federation and the Irish league —

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

Mr Dallat: — should be continued, albeit in a different way. The way to do it is to provide funding to credit unions for the first time so that they can send out field officers to promote them.

Mrs Cochrane: I also welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. The motion, coming as it does the week before Christmas, represents a fitting topic for debate, given the additional financial toll that the festive season takes of all, not just the most vulnerable. In addition to the traditional Advent and family celebrations, in December we face the prospect of buying numerous gifts for loved ones, stocking our kitchen for guests, attending Christmas parties and, of course, exhausting our home heating systems to combat the delightful Northern Ireland winter. This is arguably the time of year when people struggle most financially to make ends meet, and that struggle serves as the impetus for today's motion.

Research by Consumer Focus shows that the number applying for payday loans has increased fourfold in the past five years. Payday loans amounted to £100 million in 2004, and that had risen to £1.7 billion in 2010. The figures are well evidenced, yet they are a source of bewilderment when we learn of payday loans' high interest rates, which can range from 1,500% to 4,000%. However, much of a surprise

as that may be, it is important to maintain perspective, and perhaps an even bigger surprise for consumers are the figures charged by some of our most prominent high street banks. Using the same logic applied to calculating APR for payday loans, in one high street bank, an unauthorised overdraft of £100 will see the consumer charged £200 for every 28 days that they are in the red, which is an equivalent annualised percentage rate of over 819,000%. Banks are quick to point out that using APR for short-term loans is misleading, yet that is the rate used when we assess payday loans. Viewing it in that light, we can perhaps better understand why people resort to payday loans as an alternative to unauthorised overdrafts. The simple reality is that, for many in our society, traditional paths to obtaining good credit and a stable credit history are neither accessible nor followed.

In its 2010 review of high-cost credit, the Office of Fair Trading concluded that high-cost credit lenders were providing a service. We are in a cold recession, and, with banks becoming increasingly stringent about how much and to whom they will lend, high-cost credit lenders provide an option for those unable to obtain finance elsewhere. There are, of course, reasons to be concerned about such loans, but it is wrong to assume that they are never put to good use. In the right circumstances and with the right information available, consumers can benefit. However, the explosive growth of payday loans is such that the advertising and marketing techniques of lenders have transformed, migrating from daytime to prime time in the pursuit of their target market. A worrying level of social familiarity is creeping into the mainstream. For all that we know of Wonga.com's witty puppet-on-a-string advertising, knowledge around debt management and suitable lending alternatives is lacking.

I mentioned that the motion presents a timely topic for debate. It is more opportune still, given the consideration currently being awarded to the same issue at Westminster. The motion is correct in asserting that, from a legislative perspective, the Executive should seek to engage with their Westminster colleagues in addressing the issues around payday loans. Members will be aware that devolved aspirations that run contrary to the status quo, such as recent efforts evidenced in the Scottish Parliament, must ultimately yield on consumer issues to the Westminster powers that be. The legislative onus in those affairs lies with London, and it is from that point that we have to take our steer.

The motion calls for fair interest rates. I agree that interest rates that are consistent and better regulated represent fair practice for the lender and the consumer. The service needs to be balanced, and due caution and responsibility needs to be exercised on all sides. I do not oppose payday loans in their entirety, but we must protect our consumers. A better approach would be to help people to protect themselves through ensuring better communication of the implications and a better overall understanding of the process.

The prevailing concern is that payday lenders are only lightly regulated. The industry attempted to resolve that through the payday lending code, but many refused to support it, claiming that it did not go far enough. Westminster has agreed to investigate the impact of an interest rate cap but has also stated that restraint is necessary so as not

to damage vulnerable people's access to credit and that alternatives should be explored.

Tighter regulation, as opposed to self-regulation, is required. That responsibility lies solely with Westminster. Therefore, should Members want to positively affect the financial well-being of our citizens, they could champion alternatives such as credit unions, which are limited by law to an APR of 26.8%.

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

Mrs Cochrane: We should also advocate enhanced financial education through Citizens Advice and others.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the fact that we have been able to bring this matter forward today, as it coincides with the time of year when demand for a short-term loan system is at one of its highest levels, as has been stated. I welcome and note the comments of colleagues so far. We need to get a handle on the current situation.

This type of business is nothing new. It has existed one way or another through the ages. However, where we currently sit, it is probably at its most expansive ever, with the marketing side of the business flooding our society with material. Quite frankly, it is in your face daily. We heard the statistics that Mr Nesbitt gave.

4.30 pm

The motion is pitched at just the right level. Although we are aware of our responsibilities in the devolved Administration, we have concerns and it is imperative that we engage with Her Majesty's Government and the Financial Services Authority on this matter to ensure fair interest rates and protection for people who engage with those companies.

Regulation is crucial. Since the motion was laid in the Business Office, I have had the opportunity, on several occasions, to engage with folk who are users of the short-term payday loans system, and I have seen how it impacts on their lives. That is from a negative and dire situation through to, perhaps, a lesser percentage of people who make it work for them in a positive way but with strict discipline and controls on how they manage their personal situations. Unfortunately, not everyone falls into the latter bracket and, more and more, it is the desperate, needy and most vulnerable with spiralling debts who are drawn into the system by taking out expensive short-term payday loans, trying to give themselves a breathing space and a short period of reduced pressures. However, they are building on an already weak financial foundation and are putting off the inevitable collapse.

Most of us will have a fair insight into the extent of the problem through the issues and related matters brought to us through our constituency offices. Although I mentioned people who use the payday loans system to their advantage in a calculated, measured and disciplined way, it is due to our concern for those who are desperate, victims of the economic climate and the credit boom of the past era, whose circumstances are now spiralling out of control, that we support the motion. It is clear that it is the despairing group of people that I mentioned who are being targeted, and we are concerned at the number of companies that

have sprung up across Northern Ireland recently at a somewhat hurried and aggressive rate.

We have established that banning such shops and their services will not get rid of the need of those who want to borrow small amounts of money nor will it solve any of the problems of those who are in financial distress. In fact, throughout November, those shops and on-line services saw a 23% increase. Banning them would just mean that people who are struggling would go to informal loan sharks, who make the payday loans companies look like angels. There is no regulation of those loan sharks and, obviously, they resort to other means to get their money back.

A better solution would be to ensure that fair interest rates and protection are offered to people taking out such loans. Bankruptcy or binding arrangements on creditors could also be made much easier. In that way, lenders would take more care and time in giving credit to people who cannot really afford it. It is absurd that those shops can apparently make a decision on who to lend to within an hour of an application form being submitted.

I urge the Executive to protect vulnerable people and to be mindful that the Christmas period will force even more low earners further into debt. Anyone in negative equity or in a job and struggling with their debts should, perhaps, be filing for bankruptcy and not borrowing more. It is essential that appropriate action is taken now to ensure that the right advice is given to find a sensible long-term solution to the debts in our constituencies. Borrowing more with high interest rates is definitely not the answer, however small the amount.

We need to get the message out that people need to keep well clear of payday loans. We need to instil an attitude of, "do I need it right now or can I get it in two to three months' time when I have saved for it?" There is fierce marketing of payday loans, and we have seen the shop-front advertising of the money shops, gold shops and cash converters. Those, and the online services being advertised, need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

We want to ensure that vulnerable people are properly protected, and the Executive are working with the financial industry and consumer organisations to ensure that people have the protection that they need. I support the motion.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion as well and congratulate our colleagues for bringing this important subject matter to the Floor of the Assembly.

Debt and its associated problems are matters that constantly engage MLAs, MPs and councillors in their ongoing constituency work. We have all experienced that, even in the better times. However, although this issue is not new, these are not better times, and in the current economic downturn, we have seen an increase in the affliction of debt in our communities and an increase in those companies that offer short-term, high-cost loans, and which are, in effect, prospering on the backs of people who are already in quite significant economic difficulty.

The current global economic crisis has its genesis in the untrammelled greed and ambitions of banks and financial institutions. They, too, albeit at the macro level, were offering easy credit. The consequences of that are all around us,

and many people now operating at the micro level and who find themselves compelled to turn to these high-cost loan companies are experiencing the same consequences from the application of the same principles. In my view, that is a call to action by Governments.

Therefore, I am surprised that we do not have an Executive Minister here. The motion is quite explicit in recommending to the Executive that they raise the issue with the Westminster authorities. They could go further by perhaps agreeing a common position with other devolved Assemblies. From some of the notes that I read in preparation for the debate, it is clear that there are problems elsewhere: Scotland was specifically referenced, as was the north east of England. There would be widespread support for some form of regulatory intervention and arrangement.

These companies are legal, and nobody is arguing that they are not, but their actions have untold implications at the social level. John Dallat explained the motivation and rationale for the emergence of the credit union movement. At that time, it was dealing with the growth in the loan shark industry and the fairly unscrupulous, and at times quite brutal, methods used by loan sharks to ensure that their financial return was secured.

We may well be heading into that spiral, when it comes to people who are either in low income jobs or dependent on benefits and find themselves circulating around these companies with a view to securing short-term loans and perhaps rotating loans where they find they are slipping into default. Given the interest charges, loans can double within six months. It is possible to do that and to go undetected if you are rotating loans between different companies. In the briefing pack, there was an example of a lady who found herself facing horrendous debt problems. She had loans with seven different companies and found herself increasingly being driven into unmanageable debt.

We have to get a grip on this problem, and we have to do so before it starts to visit us at our doors and when people are losing their homes. We have seen it happen with the banks. We have seen people being encouraged to take on ever more debt and being unable to cope. They end up in negative equity and find themselves losing their homes and jobs and slipping into the cycle of despair. That is what is in front of us unless we deal with this.

Again, I thank our colleagues for bringing this matter to the Assembly. I wholeheartedly endorse the recommendation for the Executive to take action. They are not here, but I hope that the Executive are paying attention and will respond to the motion.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, commend the Members who tabled the motion. According to the Association of Business Recovery Professionals in November 2011, 60% of the population said that they were worried about their current level of debt. Therefore, it is right and proper that this motion is brought before the House, especially, as some Members have said, when it is so close to Christmas and families in particular are feeling the pinch.

It is important to note that this motion is not about hindering entrepreneurialism. It is about promoting ethics in business, companies being responsible in the way that they operate

and ensuring that the most vulnerable in our society are protected. That should be paramount as we look at this issue.

It is probably fair to say that we have all seen advertisements, whether on television or the internet, that offer, for example, 10-minute money at no extra cost or saying, "Apply in two minutes and get money fast." We have all noted with concern the interest rates of 1,000%, 2,000%, 3,000% or even 4,000%. We must ask ourselves how those companies can be allowed to exploit vulnerable customers so openly.

Recently, a lot of research has been done on the issue, prompted by widespread concern about short-term or payday loans, and some of that research is quite frightening. An Office of Fair Trading review of high-cost credit pointed to the characteristics of customers who access such credit. They tend to have an urgent need for credit and a more limited disposition to shop around. They also tend to have lower incomes and are less financially capable. Many have poor credit ratings or none at all. That paints a picture of very vulnerable customers and supports the motion's call for measures to be taken to ensure that those customers are protected.

A further statistic from 'Which?' shows that the value of payday loans has increased from £1.2 billion in 2009 to £1.9 billion in 2010. Unsurprisingly, it appears that as people feel the effects of austerity measures, particularly when credit from banks is increasingly difficult to come by, they are more inclined to seek out such loans. However, measures that are used by payday loan companies may also have added to that increase. A 'Which?' researcher found that when they applied for a payday loan from one company, they were plagued afterwards with e-mails from third parties offering more loans. The company itself phoned constantly to offer further loans or loan extensions. We need to look into such unscrupulous practices, as they are clearly designed to get less-well-off, vulnerable people into increasing debt.

As has been noted, the Westminster Government have been looking into the issue closely. They have examined a number of factors, including caps on the total cost that can be charged for credit. It is important that we see the outcome of the research that they have commissioned. However, as has been noted, we are probably not looking at that hopefully. In some regards, it appears that they have already taken the side of the payday loan companies.

I welcome the call for the Executive to discuss payday loans with Her Majesty's Government and the Financial Services Authority. Much of the work that has already been done by Westminster should be looked at again. I hope that the coalition Government will look again at that research and, perhaps, change their view on the matter.

I agree with Members that credit unions are a suitable substitute. Indeed, they are more than suitable: they are superior by a long way. We should encourage our constituents who come to us with debt issues to speak to their local credit unions. It might also be worth reopening the conversation about high-street lenders, although some of their practices have been questioned. Although I hate to say it, high-street banks could perhaps learn one important lesson from payday loan companies: how to allow access to quick credit when it is needed, albeit charged at reasonable rates.

I support the motion and commend it to the Assembly.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House. The issue of payday loans is important, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on it. As an Assembly, we must ensure that advantage is not taken of the most vulnerable in society, and the debate can send that message to the public.

Payday loans are a concern, given the economic climate, which brings with it pay freezes and higher living costs for many. They find it harder than ever to make ends meet, and the temptation to use payday loans is, therefore, growing. That can lead to some people's debts spiralling out of control. What starts off as a relatively short-term solution can run into an ongoing scenario from one month to the next. That is not surprising, given that interest rates can be as high as 4,000%. For that reason, I have no problem in supporting the motion's call for fair interest rates.

I come from a family that has suffered financial hardship. My father died when I was 13 years old and my mother was left with a family of six. As my father had left no will, his estate had to go into probate. That meant that no funds were made available until the estate was administered by the solicitor. For many months, my mother had to make do on the goodwill of local shopkeepers, and because of the community knowledge of families, she was able to obtain credit at no extra cost during her time of financial need. Otherwise, I and the other members of my family could have found ourselves in care. Therefore, I really appreciate the circumstances that are being discussed.

4.45 pm

The scale of the practice is worth mentioning. High-cost credit products are typically small loans that are borrowed over short periods. They commonly include home credit, pawnbroking and the issue at hand: short-term sum lending such as payday loans. Although there are no official figures for the number of people who avail themselves of payday loans, Consumer Focus, the statutory consumer body for England, Wales and Scotland, estimated that 1.2 million people took out 4.1 million loans in 2009. Consumer Focus research from 2010 and recent Citizens Advice figures show that the number of payday loan users quadrupled over the previous four years.

The recent Department for Business, Innovation and Skills/HM Treasury consumer credit and personal insolvency review of November 2011 gives some perspective to the debate. The review states that although there are obvious concerns about the high-cost credit market, it must also be acknowledged that without access to the products that are offered within that market:

"many poorer and more vulnerable consumers would struggle to access legal credit sources at all."

It is vital that we ensure that people in need do not rush off to loan sharks or to other illegal sources of income.

The dangers of overdrafts and charges, and the adverse credit rating that can stem from those, are also worrying. It is widely accepted that banning payday loans would not necessarily help consumers to avoid financial difficulties.

As regards tackling the issue, the final report of the Office of Fair Trading's 'Review of high-cost credit' suggested a number of remedies. One of those remedies was:

"Helping consumers make informed decisions".

A further remedy was:

"Promoting best practice among suppliers of high-cost credit".

Another remedy was:

"Enhancing understanding of developments in the high-cost credit sector".

The motion calls for fair protection for those who take out payday loans, and those three remedies would certainly do that.

For the reasons outlined, it is essential that there is a fair interest rate and protection for those who take out payday loans. I support the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion.

A Treasury report of November 2011 that dealt with high-cost credit stated:

"The Government recognises that there is widespread concern about the high cost credit market, in particular the cost of accessing affordable credit for some of the most vulnerable consumers. However, the Government also acknowledges that without access to the products offered within this market, many poorer and more vulnerable consumers would struggle to access legal credit sources at all. Keeping consumers out of the hands of illegal loan sharks remains a priority for the Government."

As my colleague Conor Murphy indicated earlier, it seems a bit ironic that the same Government are implementing policies to cut benefits, which will mean that some people will be left to run households on £67.50 a week. It is any wonder that people go to what might be described as high-tech loan sharks?

I worked in the voluntary sector and I ran an advice centre in Newry in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, loan sharks waited outside post offices while women cashed their child benefit books and they then took amounts of money with high interest rates. Pubs in the area were known to take order books, cash them on Thursdays and charge high interest rates. They then retained the books and gave people credit in the form of drink or whatever. That was tolerated to some degree by the authorities even though it should not have been.

Here and in Britain, we have the meanest pension system in the developed world. That is well documented. Yet they wonder why older people, in particular, cannot manage and turn to these high-tech loan sharks.

The Office of Fair Trading published a report in June 2010, which alluded to tackling some of those issues. In its conclusion, the report refers to:

"securing a step-change in financial capability in a group of the population that, typically, has lower than average final educational achievement, through, for example, a large scale adult education initiative".

That is patronising to say the least. In my experience, you do not have to be uneducated to take out payday loans. Indeed, many people who are well educated find themselves in difficulties.

That report also refers to:

"effecting a cultural change in society's and individual consumers' approach to credit."

The OFT report goes on, ironically, to suggest other ways of dealing with those particular problems and talks about:

"either subsidising or requiring mainstream financial suppliers to offer loans in these markets that meet consumers needs at reasonable prices, and ... a substantial increase in the direct provision of credit to consumers in these markets through, for example, a much expanded version of the Government's Social Fund."

Under the proposed so-called welfare reform, the social fund is being abolished. Its whole format is being changed. In Britain, it is going to the local authorities where there are, possibly, the infrastructures to deal with it. Here, the Department for Social Development is still dithering and wondering what it is going to do about the social fund. Budgeting loans or crisis loans, which people rely on, will be gone very shortly, by 2013, unless a viable alternative is put in place. Fortunately, in my area in Newry, there is a very good credit union that has saved many people from going into the type of debt that we are talking about today.

In conclusion, the British Government seem to have a very laissez-faire attitude to loan sharks and loan companies. There is no proper regulation and there needs to be. People need to be educated as to how they are going to be affected and about the exorbitant rates of interest that are charged.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the proposers of the motion. It is particularly poignant at Christmas, because I am deeply concerned for those in our society who are unable to make ends meet and who become the victims of payday loan companies. In expressing my concern, I cannot commend highly enough the credit union movement for the great work that it does. In doing so, it would be remiss of me not to commend the likes of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, The Salvation Army and the Methodist mission for the tremendous work that they do to alleviate poverty and to break the grip that some of those companies and loan sharks have on people.

Technically, payday loans are supposed to be short-term loans that are designed to tide people over until payday, but I wish they only worked that way. The reality is that, on many occasions, they are used as a long-term borrowing mechanism by vulnerable people who are underfunded. They cascade the loans, and one loan leads to another. Charges for payday loans, as other Members mentioned, typically range from £13 to £18 in interest for every £100 borrowed, but can be as high as £30 for every £100 from some online providers. When you multiply it up, paying £13 for every £100 for a week or two, or perhaps three weeks at most, can generate APRs of over 1,000% and in some cases, up to 2,000%. Annual APR rates are being faced by people who, in turn, due to financial pressures, default and spiral into a trap. That harsh financial reality is being faced by an increasing number of people as a result of the current economic and unemployment situation. It is particularly

poignant as we approach Christmas, because people will borrow money against their better judgement to provide for their children.

A recent R3 survey found that 45% of those questioned struggled to make it to payday, rising to 62% among 24- to 44-year-olds not able to stretch their wages to payday. The fact that the greatest proportion of those using payday loans are increasingly among that younger generation is very worrying. If they are using payday loans, it means, effectively, that they have already begun to develop bad money management skills.

The concerns about payday loans are well documented by consumer financial organisations. The associated fees and charges beyond the initially agreed period are never displayed and are often exorbitant. Insufficient advice is available on what would happen if the terms of repayment cannot be met, in contravention of OFT responsible lending guidelines. In a few cases, potential borrowers have been refused information on deferral charges until they have signed on the dotted line. That effectively means that they are entering that agreement blind. I also have serious concerns about the marketing, sales and debt collection methods of some of those companies.

The industry has been given plenty of opportunity to reform itself but has not made the changes needed to protect the customer from the debt trap. During the summer, the industry attempted to resolve this by launching a payday lending code, which provided a response to some critics. However, many organisations refused to support it, claiming that it did not go far enough or have enough impact. The Government have finally agreed to investigate the impact of a variable interest rate cap for the high-cost credit industry, and that is to be welcomed. However, there is concern that that is just a holding response that will not get much beyond the research page.

The reality is that the only sensible option is tighter regulation rather than simply leaving it to self-regulation. Sensible safeguards have to be put in place to stop payday loan users from getting caught in vicious debt traps. The key to that is limiting the number of loans that people can take out and limiting the number of rollovers.

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

Dr McDonnell: Banks must do more to provide short-term loans to cash-strapped customers and be much more transparent with their fees. I could go on because there is a lot to be said about this, but the House must do what it can.

Mr G Robinson: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate and congratulate my party colleagues for securing it.

It is a sad day when we have to consider what amounts to legalised extortion, such is the way that some payday loans are dealt with. There have been reports of interest rates of between 1000% and 4000%, and, like other Members, I encourage those in financial distress to contact their local credit unions instead for financial assistance. The fact that firms that offer those services are needed is proof that people are suffering due to the severe economic times that we are in. In some cases, people must feel great need when they have to turn to that solution.

It is also a shameful reality that a few — it is only a few — companies use the opportunity of somebody's financial distress to make a profit. Therefore, as the motion says, it is essential:

"the Executive ... engage with Her Majesty's Government and the Financial Services Authority to ensure fair interest rates and protection for people taking such loans."

This time of the year is expensive for everyone, especially families. Come January and beyond, people will be faced with the bills that Christmas brings. However, I do not believe that payday loans are always the answer. Indeed, it is well known that some payday loans can make a difficult financial situation worse due to the extortionate interest that is charged if payment of the loan is not made in full on payday. That worry on its own can bring on health problems such as stress, heart problems, and so on. I urge all Members to support the motion to protect people from those who care not about the person but simply about profiteering. I fully support the motion.

Mr Girvan: I thank all those who contributed this afternoon to what is a very timely debate, and a number of Members made comments to that effect.

I will run through a few points, some of which link in very well with exactly what is going on. A number of Members referred to the fact that we are dealing with people who are acting as legal loan sharks, and that term was used. Conor Murphy mentioned asking the Consumer Council to look into bringing forward some guidance on the matter and on the predatory lending tactics used by some companies. In fact, on looking through the evidence, it was quite clear that when people make an application to one of those companies, they seem to be inundated with contact from others. Therefore, there is also the message that the companies are sharing information with other similar companies.

5.00 pm

Mike Nesbitt raised an issue, and I will not go down the same route by saying that women are less able to do this than others. Some of the ladies whom I know are probably much better at financial controls than some of the gentlemen. He also mentioned the Consumer Council and the Money Advice Service's lack of commitment to Northern Ireland on some of the points that have been made. In fact, he asked for it to be investigated and for a strategy to address some of the financial issues associated with it.

John Dallat gave a good history of credit unions. I am glad to say that they were formed by two good Protestants — Presbyterians. He referred to the two groups of credit unions. Adrian, who proposed the motion on behalf of our party, only received correspondence. He did not request it, but it was volunteered by the credit union, which sent it to him. Using credit unions is probably the safest and easiest way to save and to borrow in the short term. Among the briefing papers that Members received was a league table identifying that credit unions have some of the lowest repayment rates.

Judith Cochrane said that some of the lending practices of high-street banks needed to be seriously looked at. For example, a person who was £100 overdrawn could be paying double in 28 days due to fees and other reasons. Judith said that that should be taken to our MPs so that

Westminster is asked to tighten regulation, as opposed to self-regulation. That needs to be seriously looked at.

David Hilditch mentioned the number of cases coming through the doors of constituency offices. I am sure that each and every Member receives people who are in financial hardship. Unfortunately, loan sharks are taking advantage of that. Mickey Brady said that they are hi-tech loan sharks who can hide behind a computer screen. Mitchel McLaughlin said that people have come to speak to him about debt problems. In the current climate, financial hardship is becoming more of a problem for many more people who are falling into the trap of being dependent either on loans or on benefits. Those most affected are in low-paid jobs or are living on benefits. The most vulnerable find it very difficult to make ends meet.

It does not affect only one social class. It affects others who have the increased commitment of houses that were purchased in the boom when the banks were giving out credit. That has contributed to the problem. People were allowed to buy houses that are now in negative equity; they are still paying the interest on their loans. Some of those people would have had disposable income, but, due to our economic crisis, they are falling into the hands of people who will offer them money to get through. Those who do not make the full payment by next payday are in big trouble. It is only then that you see the extortionate interest rates. I saw one advertised on television, which, when you sat back and read it, you realised would be 2,483% if the loan were allowed to run on for a year. Now, that is horrendous, and some people get into the cycle of doing that.

David McIlveen said that 60% of people surveyed had worries about falling into debt. That is a worrying statistic. He also said that ethics needed to be promoted so that there is ethical lending as opposed to solely looking at profitable lending. That issue was raised. The other point made was that, between 2009 and 2010, there was an increase of almost £600 million to £1.9 billion in the amount borrowed through payday loans. That is a very worrying trend.

Ross Hussey also said that he was looking for fair interest rates. He then raised his family story. I feel that those are points to be made: we are dealing with individuals, we are dealing with families. Only that there was family support there, they could also have fallen into a similar position. Members referred to credit unions, which are an example of communities trying to look after communities. That issue is there: you have people who will have an interest in doing that.

Mickey Brady talked about the high-tech loan sharks. It is unfortunate that, after going through this revolving door, people are being driven into having not just one or two but five or six payday loans. They borrow off one to pay another, and they get stuck in a revolving door and keep moving forward on that basis. Proper regulation is needed. The only way to deal with this is through legislation to ensure that interest rates are fair and people still have access to lending. The point was made that it would be wrong for people not to be able to lend.

Alasdair McDonnell said that 45% of people struggled to make it to payday. Just add that to the figure of 60% of

people with a fear of falling into debt, and we see that we need to move forward.

Finally, George summed up by saying that we need to look at this to ensure that it is not just down to making profit for the company. We have to consider a way forward. On that basis, the motion is timely, and I present it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the number of companies that are offering short-term payday loans to people who require additional money to make ends meet before their next payday; and calls on the Executive to engage with Her Majesty's Government and the Financial Services Authority to ensure fair interest rates and protection for people taking such loans.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Primary Schools: South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have eight minutes.

Mr McGimpsey: I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this important issue forward. It is important particularly to communities living in south Belfast, and I am grateful to the Minister for being here this afternoon.

In inner south Belfast, we refer to three primary schools that are extant: one in Sandy Row, called Blythefield; one on the Donegall Road that services the Village area; and one at Fane Street that services the Lisburn Road community. All those buildings are long past their useful life. Indeed, they represent buildings from a bygone age, not simply in design but in scope, with small classrooms designed for large numbers of pupils. The proposal, which fits as well into the education strategy as it does into an economic strategy, is to bring the three primary schools together under one roof in a newbuild facility that will service the area. We are looking at a total long-term school population of around 400, which will require a school building with 14 classrooms. According to the Department's standards, around one and a half hectares will provide the required space for the build.

There have been long discussions in these communities over a number of years to get people to, first, agree to come together and, secondly, to agree on a site in south Belfast. The area is densely built-up and has been partially redeveloped, and it is awaiting further redevelopment. It is one of the most economically deprived areas anywhere in Northern Ireland, and it suffers from severe educational disadvantage. The area is tailor-made for the education authorities to invest properly in the future of the young people there so that they can get the start that they merit in our caring society.

It seems to me that the proposed amalgamation of the three primary schools clearly fulfils the criteria for the Department's long-term strategy. Indeed, the Department has indicated that it fits with that strategy. One site is available, which is the car park to the rear of Belfast City Hospital. The Belfast Trust agreed to release the site for the local community, and it is almost the required size of one and a half hectares. Sites on Blythefield, Sandy Row, Donegall Road and Fane Street are all less than half the necessary size. Sandy Row is being redeveloped, and the Village area is undergoing a similar process, so there are no other opportunities to provide a suitable site that fulfils the local community's requirements for access and will mean that they can regard the development as part of their community. Consensus is always the way forward in these issues, particularly when dealing with parents and communities. We need to get that local support on the ground, and we have it for this particular site. As I said, that took many years of discussions, and I am grateful to

Councillor Bob Stoker in particular for the role that he played in keeping the issue to the fore. The Belfast City Hospital site has the opportunity to fulfil a basic requirement of those communities: a primary school that is fit for purpose, modern and up to date and that will give an opportunity for serious investment in education and, therefore, in the academic achievement of our young people. A new 14-classroom school building is what we are looking for.

The current problem is that, in April 2010, the Planning Service told us that the only way to absolutely confirm the viability of the project would be to prepare and submit a full planning application, as there were what it referred to as complex planning issues. That planning application needs £16,000, and, to date, the Department has failed to authorise the board to proceed with it. That is very disappointing for me and the people in the local communities, who have invested a great deal of time and effort in the project. That disappointment happened for the sake of the £16,000 that is needed to prove the viability of the project. Once we prove its viability, we can get investment for this area. I do not think that there is a more glaring need for investment anywhere in Belfast than in this community, and I am disappointed that we cannot get any movement on the issue. The Minister wrote to me recently about the project, about which I had written to him. One line in his letter concerns me and the local community:

"There are valid reasons to support the rationalisation of these three schools in advance of a new capital build".

Again, that fills the local community with concern that, somehow or other, the Department is looking to slip away from what we regarded for a number of years and with predecessors of the current Minister as a commitment. There is a clear need, and, with education, we have an obligation to address that need.

5.15 pm

It is also important because the Belfast Trust has agreed to allow a very large car park at the back of Belfast City Hospital, which originally would have been housing, to go back into community use. When we have that coming together of opportunity to use the site for local communities' needs, are we to be thwarted by not having the £16,000 to allow us to go to the planners to prove viability? I have absolutely no doubt that that viability can be swiftly demonstrated. That will allow us to go forward to the next stage, which is a newbuild. Indeed, the board is all set and ready to go. It has a strategy, as far as design and build is concerned, to rapidly put new buildings on the ground, as it is currently doing with the primary school at Taughmonagh. There is, therefore, a duty on us.

I know that capital is tight and is an issue, but there is an opportunity and a need here. As I understand it, there is also an opportunity coming, with capital being surrendered in other areas, but that is not a matter for me today. I feel strongly that to disappoint the communities in Sandy Row, the Village and on the Lisburn Road on this issue would be a grave error. We would let down not just those communities but current and future generations of children.

We have three primary schools. The one in Sandy Row is well over 100 years old. In fact, it is so old that it is listed. It is an old, industrial primary school, the sort of thing that was abandoned a generation ago. It is so old and so

quaint in its build and the standard that it offered that it is actually listed as an architectural oddity and of architectural merit, as indeed is Fane Street Primary School, close to the Lisburn Road. Because it is so old, has been used for such a long time and represents a design that was abandoned generations ago it, too, is listed. The third school, on the Donegall Road, is not in the same state. It was built around 50 or 60 years ago but, as I understand it, we look on the life of any school as being around 50 years. All of them, according to those criteria, absolutely fulfil the need to go forward on that issue.

I, therefore, ask the Minister to revisit that and, in particular, to revisit the permission to the board to go through the planning process to allow us to prove the viability and then to assure the community and our young people that the project will go ahead. He will save money in the long term by putting three schools into one. The Department will save money, the board will save money and, above all, the children will gain the advantage of having a fit-for-purpose primary school to fulfil, over generations, the educational needs of an area that is, as I said at the beginning, one of the most economically disadvantaged areas anywhere in Belfast, if not Northern Ireland, and, indeed, an area of severe educational disadvantage.

The project will also provide a facility for a nursery school, so we will meet the need right from preschool years — those early years, the key years for our youngsters — all through primary school. It will allow us to make the investment in our young people that all communities need to go forward.

I have made my points, and I am grateful to the Minister for being here. I should also say that I was stopped in the corridor by Mr Jimmy Spratt, who said that he could not be here but that he supports us. I am grateful to him and to other Members.

Ms Lo: I thank the Member for bringing the issue to the House. I very much support the subject of the Adjournment debate.

The whole process has been totally unacceptable. All the community groups in the area agree that there is a need for a new, better-resourced, amalgamated school. The process started in 2004, as Michael said. It has been a long process with unacceptable and protracted delays throughout its seven years. Promises were made. A feasibility study looked at all the land available in the area and at the potential for the three schools to be combined without a newbuild. The feasibility study ruled out all the options as not being right.

Michael, the then Health Minister, identified a strip of land, which raised the communities' hopes. However, those hopes were later dashed for various reasons, one of which was, as Michael said, that planning permission would cost too much money. However, the BELB had told the communities that, in many ways, the plans fitted in with its five priorities for saving money at the time. Amalgamation of the three schools met the BELB's priorities for reduced cost. The BELB supported the communities in saying that it would take only a few months to complete the feasibility study and submit planning permission. However, none of those plans went forward. The communities were told that there was no money and that it could not be done.

The communities had worked very closely together all along, and we want communities to work together for a common goal. However, they are now fearful that one of the schools will be closed and they will all be put into one location. Therefore, instead of community cohesion and working together, the three schools now have to compete against one another, which is not good for community relations.

People are very concerned with the process initiated by the Education Minister on the viability and status of all schools. They are concerned that Blythefield Primary School, one of the smaller schools, will be closed. There is a lot of uncertainty and fear about that possibility among pupils, parents, teachers and the board of governors. People are very concerned.

There is a clear lack of joined-up thinking. New social housing is being built in the area, and we have neighbourhood renewal, yet those communities are told that there is no money for a new school. Building a new school is the way to retain the community in the area and create community cohesion and continuity. The prospect of Dunmurry High School being closed next June is also causing parents a lot of uncertainty. Many parents have already taken their children out of that school rather than waiting until next year.

People are really angry about the lack of effort by the BELB and DE to address educational underachievement in this Protestant working-class community. There has been research, and there have been debates in the Chamber about the lack of achievement and the consequences of those young people facing long-term unemployment. Getting them a good education is surely the way to get them out of deprivation and generational unemployment.

Many people in that area are very concerned that, if Blythefield Primary School is to be closed, it will threaten the long-term sustainability of the whole inner-city area. I appeal to the Minister to rethink and to put all his effort into giving that community a school that is fit for purpose. It is agreed by many that there is a need for it and that the site identified by Michael in the Belfast City Hospital area is convenient for everybody. I hope that the Minister will consider that.

Mr McDevitt: I am very happy to participate in this Adjournment debate. I thank Mr McGimpsey for securing it. I apologise for Alasdair McDonnell, who would have very much liked to participate in the debate but has a prior engagement as MP. As colleagues know, he has taken an ongoing interest in trying to address the future primary educational needs of the Village and the south inner Belfast area.

As colleagues have said, the Village, Donegall Pass and Donegall Road areas are communities in transition. They paid a disproportionate price during the Troubles and have been blighted by all the worst downsides of social deprivation. Frankly, they have endured substandard housing for way too long. Thankfully, we are beginning to see progress on that, as a great part of the Village is being regenerated as we speak. The prospect of a sound educational future for those areas is still uncertain.

One of the interesting things about the three schools is their fantastic histories, which go right back into the heart of industrial Belfast. The stories that emanate from their

walls are stories that any community should be proud of and that are still evident when you visit the schools. There is a great culture of place in Fane Street, Blythefield and the Donegall Road. It is an interesting culture of place because, particularly in Fane Street Primary School, the student body has changed radically over the past decade, as new migrant communities have arrived in our city and it has become their school. The faces that you see coming out of Fane Street on any school day are an amazing kaleidoscope of modern Belfast. Those families have as much of a stake in the future of south inner Belfast as the traditional community that has lived there for many generations.

I think that Mr McGimpsey, Ms Lo and, to be fair, Mr Spratt and, I suspect, even Mr Maskey are at one with myself and Dr McDonnell in believing that a great and positive signal for the community would be to show it a good, new educational reality and make that essential investment in the south inner-city community, to say that that community will have families for many generations to come and those families will have access to the best education that this region can pay for in a facility that is shared and builds on that fantastic history of industrial Belfast but is a reflection of the new south inner Belfast and a beacon for the necessary regeneration not just of the Village area but of further on up the Donegall Road and the other parts of the south inner city.

It is worth noting that, although we make a plea for the primary sector through Mr McGimpsey's adjournment topic, those same communities suffer a very raw deal when it comes to post-primary education.

Most of the kids in those communities have to access post-primary education some distance away from their homes, and there is a great injustice in that. To the Minister's credit, he referred to that during Question Time. Even though they are surrounded by some of the finest educational establishments in this region, for one reason or another, there appear to be very high walls around those establishments when it comes to the children and young people from inner-city South Belfast.

5.30 pm

One of the best ways of bringing those walls down would be to invest even more in the primary school education of those children to build capacity so, as we reform post-primary education, they are taught to believe that the walls of those schools are not so high that they cannot climb over and that they could walk to a post-primary school within half a mile of their home. That is how close some of the best schools in Northern Ireland are to those kids' homes.

I do not want to detain the House longer, except to thank Mr McGimpsey again for showing leadership and securing the debate. I want to put on record the SDLP's ongoing commitment to the rejuvenation, reinvigoration, re-establishment and future-proofing of inner-city South Belfast — a community that is close to all our hearts for all sorts of reasons.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate and to respond to the comments from the South Belfast representatives who are present in regard to the proposed amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street primary schools.

I want to put a few matters on record. This proposal is at the early stages. I understand the frustration of political representatives and local community groups when they hear such a comment, but when you match it against the proposed time frame that a number of schools across the North have been working to for new plans and new beginnings, this proposal is at the early stages. In fact, it does not appear in any previous announcements regarding proposed newbuilds by my predecessor, Cairtriona Ruane, or by previous direct rule Ministers. However, that should not make the proposal any less important, and it should not demean the merits of any proposal in respect of the time frame or length of time that the proposal has been around. I put that on record only to put in context some of the timescales that schools can work to for newbuilds.

Events can overtake schools, even those that are on a list somewhere or that were announced by previous Ministers when we were in more favourable financial times. One of the events that can overtake schools is falling enrolments, which can happen for a variety of reasons. That is not always to do with the quality of education in the school or with the dedication of senior management or teachers. It is to do with demographic change, population shifts and decisions made by parents to move children to other schools.

One reason why there are school closures is because parents have decided not to send their children to a school in a particular place for particular reasons. That is why schools close. Across the three schools, there are 1,324 available places, but only 407 pupils attend across them. Across the North, there are 85,000 empty school desks and they are built up on numbers such as that.

In fairness, the local representatives and Mr McGimpsey and others have raised this matter with me several times. They have come forward with a proposal to amalgamate the schools and to build a new one on a single site. On the face of it, that looks like a very worthwhile proposal, which is worth exploring further. I am not suggesting that we will not explore it further, but that might be the final destination of those schools. Surely, in the interim, we should be looking at the immediate future and at the amalgamation of those schools on one site.

I can understand the suspicions and, perhaps, the frustrations of communities and school leaders when they hear such comments. Mr McGimpsey referred to a line from a letter that I sent to him earlier in the term, which had hinted at such a proposal. However, the more pupils those schools lose, the less tenable they become as centres of education, and the education of the pupils who continue to attend those schools subsequently suffers. Although I respect the right of communities and local representatives to lobby for the optimum, as they should, we may not be able to provide a newbuild in the short to medium term. There is, therefore, an onus on the managing authorities of such schools to look at what we can do in the short term. An amalgamation is one proposal.

Mr McGimpsey referred to the viability of the new proposal. I am looking at these schools in a number of ways. I have asked for a viability audit of the schools that are under pressure. We had a number of questions on the issue at Question Time and we have had a number of debates around the matter. I am looking at the viability of schools going into the future. The three schools that we are

discussing will be included in that. The board will come back to my Department with a report which will include not only the schools that are under pressure, but the future plans of the board for those schools and their pupils. At that stage, there may well be amalgamation, but I do not want to pre-empt the report.

Looking at the broader circumstances in which amalgamations of schools will take place, I, as a Minister, have a responsibility to look towards how we facilitate those amalgamations, how we improve the schools estate where those amalgamations may take place, how we use our capital build programme and how we use our minor works programme to improve, in some circumstances, the existing schools estate. Unfortunately, we do not have the finances to build new schools or as many new schools where we would like them in the time frame that we would like to do it in. That is the reality of the situation. I want to be looking at providing proper and modern facilities for our young people where and when I can.

Although a school building does not necessarily equate to the quality of education contained within, I accept the argument that when a community and young people see investment being made in them through new infrastructure and new buildings, it is reflected in the outcomes of those young people's education. I can think of a number of examples, particularly in the Belfast area, where previous Ministers made significant investments in school buildings in socially deprived areas. In some instances, they are the only new government buildings that have been built in those communities for generations. Those communities recognise them as the Executive, Assembly and society making an investment in them.

I am not ruling out in any circumstances a newbuild for this proposal or, indeed, a number of others. I am saying that you are correct to lobby for a newbuild on the one site and should be lauded for doing so. In the meantime, we have to look at what is happening to those young children's education. We have to look for a short-term solution to the declining numbers across those three schools and ensure that we have a school on a site that is providing a top-rate education for those young people.

One of the most effective ways out of social deprivation and poverty is education. I note the concerns about the proposal around the high school in the area but I cannot go into detail on that. However, as has been pointed out by my colleague Mr McDevitt, there are other schools in that community that, in my opinion, should be opening their gates and tearing down the walls to allow people from the surrounding community in. Those schools should play their part in educating our society out of the current difficulties that we face. I cannot say that that is a debate for another day because it is connected to this debate, but it has been long debated. When I look at educational underachievement in inner city Belfast and hear people tell me that children have to travel long distances to secondary school, when they are surrounded by perfectly good schools, I think that there is a challenge there not only for the Department of Education, but for society.

In conclusion, I have listened carefully to the comments made by the South Belfast representatives. I am aware of the issue. It has been raised with me several times. I cannot make a definitive comment on the future of the

project and I cannot make a commitment to sign off the £16,000 for the planning process because we are looking at our entire schools infrastructure and the three schools fall into that. We are doing that because we want to ensure that the next range of schools that we build are in the right place providing the right service not just for this generation, but for generations to come.

Adjourned at 5.40 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statement

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Education

Alleged Security Breaches in relation to Post-primary School Entrance Test Papers of November 2009: Report of the Department of Education's Investigation

Published at 12.00 noon on Monday 12 December, 2011

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): On 29 May, 2011, a primary school principal and Chair of the Catholic Principals Association (CPA), reported to the Department of Education (DE) an alleged security breach involving an entrance test paper that was sat by P7 children in November 2009. The CPA also issued a public statement on the matter on the same day. This is attached at Annex A. The test paper in question was used by grammar schools within the Post-primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) for the purposes of deciding Year 8 admissions in Transfer 2010.

On June 7, 2011, I stated to the Assembly that I would keep it informed of DE's investigations into this matter. These investigations have reached a stage where this statement can now be provided.

The Chair of the CPA informed the DE that on or around the 23rd or 24th of May, 2011 a primary school principal had been approached by a parent whose child had been a P7 pupil in the 2009/10 school year. The parent passed to the primary school principal a set of test papers purporting to be the entrance test papers used by grammar schools within the PPTC and sat by some P7 children in November 2009. These papers were passed by the primary school principal to the CPA Chair who reported the issue to DE and publicly on May 29, 2011. The CPA's Press Release on the subject stated:

"The allegation is that this information and the test papers were provided by a member of staff at one of the Catholic Grammar Schools administering the test".

The CPA sent these papers to GL Assessment (GLA) - the company that produced the PPTC entrance test that was used for Transfer 2010: the CPA sent to GLA a copy of a Maths paper on 31 May, 2011 and a copy of the English paper on 1 June 2011. On June 8, 2011, the CPA sent copies of both papers to DE.

The papers are those that were sat by some P7 children in November 2009 for the purposes of grammar school admission. This has been confirmed by the GLA that produced these papers as the entrance tests that PPTC grammar schools used for admissions purposes in that year. Approximately half of grammar schools are within the PPTC.

This consortium contracted with the GLA for their provision of an entrance test – to be sat by P7 children in November 2009, for the purposes of enabling schools within the consortium to make admissions decisions using the results of the test.

Three separate security concerns were raised and/or reported by the CPA as a result of their possession of these papers. These were expressed in the Press Release at Annex A:

- **a breach in the pre-test security arrangements of the November 2009 test:** The CPA Press Release of May 29, 2011 stated that the primary school principal who had received these November 2009 test papers from a parent on or around the 23rd or 24th of May, 2011, had also been informed by this parent that "they had access to the content of the 2009 GL Assessment Test Papers prior to their child sitting the tests". In this respect the CPA was alleging a very serious breach in the pre-test security arrangements of this entrance test.
- alleged breaches in secure test development (i.e. the alleged repetition of questions) across 2009 and 2010. Having received the 2009 Test paper, the CPA Chair showed it to a small group of children who had sat the November 2010 test paper. He was concerned to find that they considered some of the 2009 test items to be the same as those they had faced a year later. The CPA Press Release stated: "some of the questions encountered by the 2009 pupils may actually have reappeared in the 2010 process".
- the evident breach in the post-test security of the November 2009 test – potentially affecting the fairness of the November 2010 & 2011 test. The arrangements governing the PPTC test are such that not only should no-one see or possess a test paper before it is sat, but also no-one but the GLA should possess a test paper afterwards. The GLA contractually required any school that used the November 2009 test to return all copies of it to GLA once the test was finished, "to be counted back in". Once it was clear, therefore, that the English and Mathematics test papers which found their way into the possession of the CPA in late May 2011 were the PPTC test papers of November 2009, it was clear that a breach in this post-test security had occurred. Indeed, the CPA Press Release stated that part of the allegation that it was reporting was that "an unknown number of parents had this paper available to them to assist their children in preparation for the 2010 test". The CPA was concerned as to the potential for this particular breach to have presented "an unknown

number of participants with an unfair advantage in their preparation for the tests”.

DE's investigation has firstly been into these three different, but related, alleged breaches. The investigation has also sought assurances from the relevant bodies about future security. The investigation has been conducted by DE officials with assistance from the PPTC, CPA, GLA and the independent Education and Training Inspectorate. I have sought and received regular updates during the course of the investigation. In relation to these three different kinds of breaches, I can now report that the investigation has found as follows.

A breach in the pre-test security arrangements of the

November 2009 test: It has proved difficult for the investigation to establish any information beyond the basic allegation in this area. The CPA has confirmed to DE that the primary school that reported this allegation did not receive or pass on any documentary information relating to, or supporting, the claim that a parent possessed the November 2009 test papers prior to their child sitting the November 2009 test. It was also confirmed to DE that both the primary school principal who reported the breach to the CPA, and the parent who reported the breach to that principal, wish to remain anonymous.

The PPTC and GL Group have also sought to obtain further information here. They have twice written to the CPA Chair seeking the information necessary to take an investigation into this specific allegation further – on 22 June, 2011 and again on 31 August, 2011. The information they sought included details about the Catholic Grammar School at which, it is alleged, the breach occurred. The Chairperson confirmed to them on September 6, 2011 that he could not provide this information and that he was required to maintain the confidence with which information had been provided to him.

As things stand then, the position on this allegation is that it remains unsupported by any evidence. My department will gladly take from any source any information that may enable further investigation on this point – but until that point must consider that further investigation is not possible.

Alleged breaches in secure test development (i.e. the alleged repetition of questions) across 2009 and 2010.

The facts here are that:

- the CPA arranged for a small number of children who sat the PPTC Entrance Test of November 2010 to be shown, in late-May 2011, the PPTC Entrance Test papers of November, 2009. According to the recollections of these children in this context, the CPA considered that “some of the questions encountered by the 2009 pupils may actually have reappeared in the 2010 process”.
- both the 2009 and 2010 PPTC test papers contained, at the outset, a distinct set of questions called “Familiarisation Questions”. To quote the GLA: “The 2009 and the 2010 Entrance Tests both began with two pages of familiarisation (‘Practice’) test items. In the English paper, this consisted of a total of 10 questions, namely: three comprehension questions relating to a short passage of text; four spelling questions; and three punctuation questions. The Maths paper contained a total of nine practice questions in

the familiarisation section, covering a range of question types featured in the examination paper. We can confirm that the same familiarisation questions were used for both the English and Maths papers in the 2009 and the 2010 sittings” (emphasis added).

- the PPTC have confirmed the nature and role of “familiarisation questions: “These questions, as the term ‘familiarisation’ suggests, are solely for the purpose of familiarising candidates with the style and layout of the questions on the paper and with the correct way to enter their answers on the multiple-choice answer sheet. The content of the questions is immaterial and the repeated use of the same questions for this function is irrelevant to any score obtained.
- both the PPTC and GLA have confirmed to my department that, aside from the repeated use of these familiarisation items which do not form part of the assessment-proper, no questions found in the 2009 test paper were repeated in the 2010 test paper – nor could this kind of repetition occur.

The 2009 and 2010 test papers both “began” with identical “familiarisation” sections. That may explain the CPA's allegation. Beyond that, however, and in terms of the questions that comprised the actual tests, there was no repetition of questions.

The evident breach in the post-test security of the November 2009 test – potentially affecting the fairness of the November 2010 & 2011 test:

Both the PPTC and GLA consider the evident breach in post-test security to be a serious breach in the contractual arrangements. All schools within the PPTC have contracted with the GLA for the provision of an entrance test and in so doing have signed a “Declaration of Use” document that commits them to the GLA's requirements in terms of security before, during and after the sitting of tests. All such schools are also provided with operational instructions on the “Security of GLA Entrance Assessment Question Papers and Associated Materials”.

All concerned consider that the evident breach in post-test security occurred within one of the PPTC schools – and indeed those are the specific terms of the allegation. The GLA is clear that there was no breach in its own secure handling of test papers and that the breach occurred within a school setting. That has been accepted by the PPTC. It appears, therefore, that a school is responsible for a security breach that is a contravention of that school's contractual agreement with the GLA.

I consider that a matter for the PPTC and the GLA. They have concluded that whilst the CPA maintains the confidentiality of the sources who reported the security breach to them and at the request of those sources, it is not possible to identify the original source of the breach and how exactly it occurred.

My concern and responsibility here, and that of my department, is the functionality of the post-primary admissions process and the obvious need for this process to reach robust and fair admissions decisions. In that context, the investigation has considered the question of whether the post-test security breach in relation to the November 2009 test papers may have affected the admissions processes of 2010 and 2011 in line with the concerns expressed by the CPA. Did this breach, which may

have allowed a past-paper to be available to children sitting the 2010 test or preparing for the 2011 test, present “an unknown number of participants with an unfair advantage in their preparation for the tests?”

The Chair of the PPTC wrote to DE on this issue on July 4, 2011. His position was that the availability of the November 2009 test prior to the 2010 and 2011 test could not particularly aid preparation. The PPTC’s argument was that, despite the PPTC’s efforts to have a secure and confidential test based on the delivery of the Key Stage 2 curriculum and not generating a preparation industry, “practice papers” for their annual assessments are annually produced (for sale) by various companies. They argued that these companies draw on the general availability of alternative GLA assessment products comparable to the PPTC test. They further argued that in a context where such specimen papers were widely available and used, some children’s alleged access to the November 2009 test as a past-paper is unlikely to have been significant in terms of admissions decisions.

My officials, with my agreement, sought the independent and expert advice of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) on this position of the PPTC. In the light of the ETI advice, DE considered that, whilst it would be impossible to prove categorically that children who had access to the 2009 materials did not have an advantage, in all probability they did not, given the plethora of test preparation materials freely available and schools’ experiences of putting children through such tests for many years.

It is also relevant to mention here that the GLA has informed my department that, at the request of the PPTC, they produce a ‘Sample English Familiarisation Booklet’ and a ‘Sample Mathematics Familiarisation Booklet’. The GLA described the purpose of these booklets as allowing “children and parents to see examples of the 11+ test questions prior to the examination and gain an understanding of how the questions would be laid out in the actual examination”. The PPTC has informed my department that “every parent who received the PPTC pre-registration pack, whether or not they registered their child for the 2009 and the 2010 Entrance Assessments, would have been sent the sample familiarisation booklets”. The circulation of these booklets adds to the fact that any November 2009 test paper illicitly in circulation before tests in subsequent years would have been available in a context where much practice material was also available. In line with the view of the ETI, therefore, my department’s investigation has concluded that children alleged to have accessed the 2009 assessment materials will not have had any greater advantage conferred on them by that experience. Furthermore, the questions used in the main assessments were different from one year to the next.

Future security: In line with its ultimate responsibility for a functional post-primary admissions process, my department has sought and received assurances from the GLA and PPTC as to how they will in future seek to strengthen their security arrangements to avoid a future breach. A letter from the Managing Director of the GLA received by my office on 10 October, 2011, provides the following:

Both GL Assessment and the PPTC take the security of the transfer tests extremely seriously. As such, we have undertaken a number of communications with the schools

participating in the transfer tests administered by GL Assessment and the PPTC in November 2011. These include:

The reissuing of the “Declaration of Use for the GL Assessment Special Access Test Series with the Post Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC)” form, which stipulates the requirements of the test administration process and confirms the school’s acceptance of these requirements. All headteachers have now signed and returned these forms to the PPTC. GL Assessment has also received copies of these signed forms.

The PPTC held a meeting with the headteachers of all of its schools on 9 September 2011 in relation to this year’s transfer tests. Security arrangements were discussed at length. Three head teachers were not able to attend but the PPTC have subsequently made contact with each of them individually to reiterate the importance of security and the security measures that schools are required to enforce.

The PPTC is also updating the Administration Instructions for the transfer tests which it sends to schools in advance of the Entrance Assessments and these will include further instructions about security...

GL Assessment never releases any past papers and we never allow schools to use papers for their own purposes or reproduce our questions. All schools involved are fully aware of the strict procedures they are contractually obliged to follow.

The process for distributing, storing and implementing the tests includes a number of precautionary measures:

All schools involved in administering the Entrance Assessments are required to sign the Declaration of Use form. All schools administering the 2009 and 2010 transfer tests signed this document and returned it to the PPTC.

The Declaration of Use form requires the Principal to report any missing materials to the Chair of the PPTC, who will then report this to GL Assessment. Neither the PPTC nor GL Assessment received any such notification during either the 2009 or the 2010 Entrance Assessment process.

All GL Assessment transfer test materials are printed at registered printers, specialising in the security of assessments and the protection of confidentiality. Prior to delivery, the materials are stored in our own secure facility and once cleared for release, they are delivered via secure couriers in tamperproof packaging.

When the test items are delivered to the schools, they can only be signed for by the named contact, which is usually the Principal or a member of the Admissions team. The materials are then taken to secure storage within the school.

On receipt of the test materials after testing has taken place, GL Assessment checks and counts in the materials against those delivered to ensure every one has been returned. Once the marking has been completed, all test papers are securely pulped.

We always endeavour to do everything in our power to ensure the security of our tests and we will continue to do so. However, as is always the case, the ultimate responsibility for security has to lie with the schools who administer the assessments.

Conclusion

There is no suggestion of any weakness in how the GLA have maintained their security in the past, nor in how they will seek to maintain this in the future. There is also a general belief amongst those principally involved that the breach in post-test security which did occur in relation to the November 2009 test occurred within one of the member schools of the PPTC. That is a specific aspect of the allegation.

The issue that remains a concern is that, as the GLA put it, “the ultimate responsibility for security has to lie with the schools who administer the assessments”. This was the case in the period when the breach occurred and it will remain to be the case going forward. It appears that someone within a school setting took a copy of the November 2009 test paper at some point before 23rd May, 2011 – in direct contravention of the security arrangements with which the PPTC, under contract to the GLA, seek to govern their administration of their entrance tests. Whether the measures that the PPTC have taken with their member schools to avoid any kind of recurrence of this will be effective remains to be seen. There is no evidence that a serious breach has occurred, but the potential for one within a school setting has been demonstrated.

Under Article 30 of the Education Order, 2006, my department has issued guidance to all post-primary schools on their admissions processes – and by law all of these schools are required to “have regard” to this guidance. For Transfer 2010, DE issued its Transfer 2010 Guidance. DE then updated this document to apply to all subsequent years and published this as “Guidance to Primary School Principals, Post-primary Schools’ Board of Governors and Principals, and Education and Library Boards on the Process of Transfer from Primary to Post-primary School from September 2010”. It is available on the DE website at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/post_primary_transfer_policy_from_september_2010_-_pdf_822kb.pdf. This document recommends that all schools do not use academic admissions criteria on educational grounds. For schools that do not follow this recommendation and that choose to continue academic selection by administering independent entrance tests, this document makes them aware in detail of the risks for which they assume responsibility. These include the potential for a breach in test security. I re-emphasise the importance of the relevant schools understanding this information.

I consider, however, that this episode stresses the inherent difficulties involved in making sure that an entrance test will always be completely secure. An independent entrance test is a high stakes test reliant on a security regime only as strong as its weakest link among all those involved within a large number of schools.

As my department’s transfer guidance reflects, the law, as it stands, may not prohibit independent entrance tests. It does, however, require schools to use admissions criteria that can robustly select for admission the number of children that a school may admit. Schools must use functional admissions criteria and my department will always act in line with this. If schools are determined not to follow DE Guidance and wish to remain able to apply academic admissions criteria on the basis of independent entrance tests, they must ensure their testing arrangements are secure and have contingency arrangements against any breaches that occur.

Annex A: 29 May, 2011 Press Release from Catholic Principals Association

The Catholic Principals Association has in the past few days been made aware of an allegation regarding the operation of the Post Primary Consortium Transfer Test process in 2009 & 2010 which if substantiated is a cause of great concern.

A member of our Association has reported that they have been approached by a parent who has stated that they had access to the content of the 2009 GL Assessment Test Papers prior to their child sitting the tests and that subsequently an unknown number of parents had this paper available to them to assist their children in preparation for the 2010 test.

The allegation is that this information and the test papers were provided by a member of staff at one of the Catholic Grammar Schools administering the test.

Fintan Murphy, Chair of the CPA stated,

“This allegation, if substantiated, is extremely serious as it undermines the integrity of the whole process of using unregulated tests. If true, it provided an unknown number of participants with an unfair advantage in their preparation for the tests and would therefore call into question the accuracy and integrity of the results and grades of all of the pupils who have sat the tests. Many principals have, since these tests began, had expressed grave concerns about the integrity and security of this process and the suggestion that the tests may have been leaked does not come as a great surprise to me personally.”

GL Assessment who provide the tests, have always been very clear that participants in these tests should never have sight of any of the tests prior to their participation and have consistently refused to provide past papers to those schools or individuals who sought them as this could potentially impact on the standardisation process of the results. GL Assessment have made clear that they do not issue ‘past papers’ and have stated that tests are provided on a confidential basis to the Post Primary Transfer Consortium. Our understanding of the process is that GL Assessment create the tests each year by extracting questions from a database of questions. It is therefore possible that questions from one test could reappear in future tests.

As supporting evidence of these allegations the CPA has been provided with copies of the papers which are reported to be the official 2009 test papers.

Fintan Murphy CPA Chair stated,

“Our initial attempt to investigate the accuracy of this claim involved showing them to participants in the 2009 tests who recall significant elements of the tests as having been those sat in 2009; though this is dependent on the recollection of young people who sat the test 18 months ago.”

“To seek further confirmation of the accuracy of this information we will be passing the tests to GL Assessment and to the Post Primary Transfer Consortium to confirm if these are the official tests as used in 2009. We will also be passing the information to

the Department of Education to inform them of our concerns.”

“Initial investigations by CPA also lead us to concerns that not only were the 2009 tests available to a number of participants but we believe that some of the questions encountered by the 2009 pupils may actually have reappeared in the 2010 process. Again this is based on the recollection of a participant in the 2010 process. If this proves to be accurate, it further undermines the process and would clearly have provided a group of pupils with a clear advantage.”

On Saturday, a significant number of pupils will have received letters confirming their rejection by grammar schools across N. Ireland largely based on their performance in the unregulated tests. Undoubtedly this will have caused much upset and distress for those 11 year old children and their families. If it is confirmed that some of children sitting these tests did so with an advantage over others; gained through access to official test papers then the whole process of the use of the tests will be called into question; not just this year but for future years. We would therefore again call on the Catholic grammar schools to end their participation in these tests and to embrace a non selective system of education.

CPA believes that this allegation, if proven, will lead to a significant number of appeals this year and potentially to judicial reviews of the use of the tests by schools this year in their selection of pupils.

CPA calls for an immediate response from both GL Assessment and the Post Primary Transfer Consortium into these allegations. In particular we would wish for;

1. A confirmation or denial that the papers which have been provided to the CPA are copies of the official papers used in 2009.
2. An explanation as to the source of these papers and how they could have entered the public domain if they are the official papers.
3. A confirmation or denial that questions included on these papers appeared in the 2010 process.
4. Clarity around the security measures which have been in place regarding the test papers in the past 2 years.
5. Confirmation that a full investigation will be undertaken into these allegations in the coming weeks.

Fintan Murphy Chair, Catholic Principals Association.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 25 November 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Gaming Skills and Qualifications in Alternative Education Provision

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they plan to connect young people, who have gained gaming skills and qualifications in alternative education provision, with job opportunities created in the sector as a result of their presentations to investors in the USA.

(AQW 2708/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): During our recent visit to the US we met with senior executives in the film and TV, video gaming and mobile applications companies to promote the potential that Northern Ireland (NI) has to offer in these sectors. On the video gaming front, we established new contacts with leading US companies who are looking for the highly qualified game developers that are graduating from our universities.

While the gaming industry in NI is embryonic, some businesses and individuals are gaining traction by developing successful mobile phone and tablet games. InvestNI is working with Digital Circle, the industry body for Digital Content in NI and gaming is one of the areas of focus. Digital Circle has developed a cluster (Bloc 54) to develop opportunities in gaming and has 30+ members.

InvestNI is supporting this clustering approach with the aim of growing the gaming sector in NI and giving smaller businesses in the industry 'critical mass'. InvestNI would encourage businesses, individuals and organisations involved in alternative education provision to get involved with the cluster to ensure that they benefit from the opportunities that are emerging.

InvestNI runs a number of start-up programmes to support new businesses opportunities in the knowledge based economy (including gaming). These programmes include:

- Go-For-It Programme
- Social Entrepreneurship Programme
- Propel Programme

In addition, InvestNI continues to pursue inward investment opportunities in the gaming industry and is actively working with Skillset, the UK sector skills council for this industry, to ensure that the skills needed in this sector are being developed and accredited.

As new job opportunities are created in the sector, the Employment Service of the Department for Employment and Learning will advise clients who have the relevant skills and qualifications about vacancies. The Department can display employment vacancies on JobCentre Online which can be accessed by unemployed clients and job changers.

Social Investment Fund Steering Groups

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the arrangements for the appointment of members to the Social Investment Fund Steering Groups.

(AQO 492/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The public consultation on our proposals for the Social Investment Fund will afford people the opportunity to express their views on issues such as the arrangements for the Social Investment Steering Groups.

Within chapter 3 of the consultation document launched on 27th September we have outlined 4 possible options regarding the establishment of those Groups.

Once the consultation period has concluded and we have considered all of the responses received, we will then determine the more detailed operational arrangements of the Fund.

Social Investment Fund Zones

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how the proposed Social Investment Fund zones were agreed.

(AQO 494/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The purpose of our public consultation on the Social Investment Fund is very much to obtain people's views on issues such as this.

The Fund is intended to target substantial resources to areas of greatest need where issues of poverty, unemployment and social disadvantage are most prevalent. The zones are therefore circled around clusters of 'Neighbourhood Renewal' and 'Areas of Risk' areas.

The public consultation document outlines a number of possible social investment zones and proposes these areas are flexible to bring in other relevant smaller areas on the basis of identified need for support.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of how the Social Investment Fund is likely to benefit communities in the North Down area.

(AQO 496/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The outcome of the public consultation process, which we launched on 27 September, will inform how the Social Investment Fund will operate and how communities will benefit.

While a number of possible investment zones have been identified at this point, it is proposed that these areas are flexible to bring in other relevant smaller areas on the basis of identified need for support.

Segregation

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action his Department is taking to reduce the amount of money spent on maintaining a segregated society.

(AQO 657/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In our efforts to address the issue of divisions, we have brought forward proposals and consulted widely on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. The Programme contained priority themes for action relating to the creation of more shared spaces and the provision of shared services.

Currently, representatives from the 5 main political parties are working together through the mechanism of a cross-party working group to achieve a political consensus on the key issues relating to the Programme. Tackling issues of segregation and identifying opportunities for the development of shared spaces and services across the region will form part of the Working Group's considerations in developing the Programme.

When the cross-party working group has completed its work, we will publish a final Programme and Action Plan that will establish the way forward. The cross-party working group has met weekly since 27 September 2011. The cross-party working group consists of:

Alliance – Chris Lyttle MLA

DUP – Junior Minister Jonathan Bell MLA

SDLP – Conall McDevitt MLA

SF – Junior Minister Martina Anderson MLA

UUP – John McCallister MLA

Trade Union Leaders: Average Salary

Mr Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the average annual salary of a trade union leader, where part of the salary is paid by their Department; and (ii) how much of a leader's salary is paid by their Department.

(AQW 3789/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department does not employ or pay any part of the salary of a trade union leader.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of funding their Department has allocated to trade unions in each of the last ten years, broken down by each union.

(AQW 3791/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: During the nine financial years ending 31 March 2010, our Department did not allocate any funding to trade unions. During 2010/2011 we, along with all other departments, contributed £3,000 towards funding a position in the FDA union.

Child Poverty

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the current economic situation, what additional measures are being considered to combat child poverty.

(AQO 612/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Child Poverty Strategy was published on 24 March 2011. This sets out the actions proposed by the Executive to address the issue of Child Poverty here.

Over the summer period, Junior Ministers have met with both departmental and non-departmental members of the Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum to discuss the departments' respective inputs to a Child Poverty Action Plan and to seek the views of the non-departmental members on what they would like to see in the Plan.

As a result of these discussions, work is now in hand to finalise a Child Poverty Action Plan and an associated Outcomes Model to drive progress of the Plan towards eradicating child poverty.

The Stakeholder Forum, which is chaired by Junior Ministers, met on Thursday, 27 October 2011, to receive an update on progress and consider the proposed Outcomes Model.

Subject to the successful completion of this phase of the work, a draft Action Plan and Outcomes Model will issue for public consultation.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Protection Fund.
(AQO 615/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive remains committed to tackling the problem of disadvantage here.

In addition to the Social Investment Fund, the Executive further proposed a Social Protection Fund to assist those most in need within the wider community. The Social Protection Fund programme will target individuals and families facing hardship due to the current economic downturn and pending welfare reforms.

The Fund will operate as an Executive Fund and as such it will be for departments, as opposed to individuals, to bid for funding for schemes. Some bids have already been submitted and our officials are currently working with other departments to assess funding options and potential initiatives including how the Social Protection Fund might assist, for example, those in fuel poverty.

Welfare Benefit Claims: Delays

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the (i) procedures in place; and (ii) progress that has been made in dealing with the delays in processing welfare benefit claims with a cross-border element as highlighted in the Ministerial Statement of 11 October 2011.

(AQW 3984/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer you to our previous correspondence on this topic, copy attached, dated 31 October, which provides the information you requested.

“During the question and answer session on 11 October 2011 which followed the Assembly Statement on the NSMC Institutional meeting, you requested further details on the system that has been put in place to resolve delays in the processing of certain Department of Social Protection welfare benefit claims with a cross-border element.

NSMC Joint Secretariat officials have explored the issue of delays in processing benefit claims experienced by Department of Social Protection (DSP) officials when dealing with claims involving UK tax credits. These claims require DSP to obtain information from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and are dealt with by HMRC along with other international requests via its call centres.

The NSMC Joint Secretariat recently facilitated a discussion between senior officials from the Social Security Agency (SSA), DSP and HMRC during which it emerged that the historical backlog of cases handled by HMRC had reduced considerably and that procedures have been initiated to clear the backlog by the end of this year. HMRC officials also expressed willingness to put an administrative solution in place to prevent a recurrence of the problem. To this end, HMRC and DSP have put specific telephone arrangements in place and have agreed to monitor the progress of cases under these new working arrangements.

Joint Secretariat officials intend to review progress under the new arrangements soon.”

OFMDFM: Staff

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the current number of departmental staff employed within OFMDFM, broken down by the sections or areas in which they work.

(AQW 3997/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The table below details staff employed at 1 October 2011 within the following Departmental business areas:

Directorate	Number of staff in post
Head of Civil Service Office	8
Resources, Regeneration, International Relations and Institutional Review	92
Executive Secretariat	73
Executive Information Service	38

Directorate	Number of staff in post
North South Ministerial Council Secretariat	11
Equality and Strategy	84
Office of the Legislative Counsel	19

In addition, the Department employs administrative staff working in the following arms length bodies:

Directorate	Number of staff in post
Planning/Water Appeals Commissions	18
Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments	2
Office of the Attorney General	13

EU Bodies: Funding

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on how the Executive plans to maximise the drawdown of funding from EU bodies.

(AQW 4061/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive's European priorities of Competitiveness and Employment, Innovation and Technology, Climate Change and Energy and Social Cohesion have been carefully aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy to target initiatives enhancing economic growth and facilitate greater access to European assistance.

The Executive has charged the cross-departmental Barroso Task Force Working Group (BTWG) with delivering these priorities and maximising engagement in European funding programmes and networks. The BTWG are commissioning an audit of European funding to develop departmental allocations for increased drawdown. Four thematic sub-groups have been established and four Thematic Desk Officers are scheduled to take up post in the Executive's Brussels Office in early 2012 to assist departments in the delivery of these priorities.

Executive Ministers will continue to engage in and seek to influence the policy debate around the Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-20 and its proposed initiatives, such as the new Connecting Europe Facility, which could provide the seed capital for trans-European network development in the areas of transport, energy and telecommunications.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail which sectors had events held for them during the consultation on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

(AQW 4101/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The consultation process on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) consisted of a combination of public meetings and a series of more focused sectoral events. All these aspects were designed to complement each other to inform the debate around the Programme for (CSI), thus leading to enriched consultation responses.

During the consultation process, specific events were held with the following sectors, some by request of the sector:

- District Council Good Relations Officers;
- Churches;
- Business Community;
- Victims & Survivors;
- Young People;
- Minority Ethnic Groups;
- Statutory Bodies;
- Funders in the Good Relations Arena;
- Academics;
- Education Sector;
- Ex-Prisoners;
- Voluntary & Community Sector (one event held in the north-west and two in Belfast); and
- Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender Sector.

The consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration attracted 288 written responses. The independent analysis included the wealth of views and material contained within the written submissions in addition to the information gathered from the discussions at the sectoral events and public meetings.

The consultation responses are now available on the OFMDFM website along with the independent analysis report and the departmental response to the issues raised. <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/community-relations/csi-consultation.htm>

Planning Appeals

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of planning appeals made in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4157/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

"I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question. In the following table, I have set out the number of appeals received by the Commission, over the last three financial years.

	Financial Year			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 (to date)
Appeals Received	515	515	431	258

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable."

Government Sponsored Preventative Spending Initiatives

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number and name of the government sponsored preventative spending initiatives aimed at children that have received cross departmental funding in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4210/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM does not lead on preventative spending initiatives aimed at children. Whilst the Ten Year Strategy For Children and Young People examines the scope for achieving a more joined-up approach within Government to children's issues, this does not replace or negate the duty of individual Ministers on those children's issues for which they have specific policy responsibility. Additionally, no central budget exists for delivering on the Strategy and ultimately individual Ministers are responsible for identifying their own priorities and developing spending plans for their own departments.

There are, however, a number of specific issues in relation to children which OFMDFM fund that may be regarded as 'preventative spending initiatives', which we have considered appropriate to take forward on a cross-departmental project basis. These are listed below:

- Play and Leisure Policy and Implementation Plan;
- Childcare Strategy and the Executive Childcare Fund;
- PlayBoard After School Childcare Projects; and
- Summer Interventions.

Draft Programme for Government: Consultation

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made with (i) the publication of a draft Programme for Government for consultation; and (ii) a legislative schedule for this Assembly mandate.

(AQW 4269/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At its meeting of 16th November, the Executive agreed the Programme for Government. The document is now available for public consultation. We are currently working with other departments in the development of a legislative programme

Household Fuel Payment

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the introduction of a household fuel payment through the Social Protection Fund to mitigate the impact of fuel poverty.

(AQW 4270/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Having considered a number of departmental bids, we are keen to see a fuel poverty initiative delivered through the Social Protection Fund.

Our officials are currently liaising with colleagues in other Departments on the scale and scope of the initiative to ensure the most vulnerable are targeted this winter.

St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena: Housing

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they had with the Joint Service Housing Advice Office about the housing at St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena being made available for purchase by serving and ex-military personnel.

(AQW 4290/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not had any discussions on the issue of the former military housing at the St Patrick's Barracks site with the Joint Service Housing Advice Office.

Legislation Referred for Crown Consent

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the primary and secondary legislation, since 2007, that has been referred for crown consent because of the potential impact on the private interests of the Sovereign or the Duke of Cornwall, including proposals for legislation not ultimately enacted.

(AQW 4301/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are not aware of any Executive legislation having been referred either for Crown Consent on account of its affect on the prerogative or interest of the Crown; or for Consent in relation to the interests of the Duchy of Cornwall or the Duchy of Lancaster.

OFMDFM: Air Travel Costs

Mr McLaughlin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total cost incurred by their Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4389/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The following table sets out the costs incurred by the Department in respect of air travel during the twelve months ended 31 December 2010.

Costs of flights between Northern Ireland and Heathrow	£30,250
Costs of flights between Northern Ireland and other GB airports	£17,356

Social Investment Fund

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the progress on the Social Investment Fund, including what types of project proposals may be considered under the proposed framework.

(AQO 724/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The outcome of the public consultation will inform how the Social Investment Fund will operate, including the arrangements for funding. However, we would expect that projects benefiting in due course will be those that have been identified and agreed by consensus as key to tackling priority issues and which display a clear link to the Fund's four strategic objectives of:

- building pathways to employment;
- tackling the systemic issues linked to deprivation;
- increasing community services; and
- addressing dereliction.

Corporation Tax

Mr T Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the discussions that have taken place on the devolution of Corporation Tax powers.

(AQO 728/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We responded on 13 October to the Exchequer Secretary's letter asking for Ministerial nominations for the Ministerial Working Group. We agreed that we, along with Minister Wilson and Minister Foster, will sit on this Group, which will seek to establish, with clarity, the costs, administrative changes and the potential legislative vehicle for transferring Corporation Tax powers to Stormont.

The Prime Minister replied to us on 3 November stating it is important that these issues are considered further before a decision can be taken.

We also wrote to the Prime Minister on the same day, stressing the urgency with which the Executive wishes to pursue the proposal to devolve Corporation Tax powers and seeking to identify the steps required to take the work to the next stage without delay. We are pleased that the Government has announced a Working Group to take this forward. However, we remain disappointed that a decision has been put off until next year instead of the Autumn.

The first meeting of the Ministerial Working Group is scheduled to take place on 15 December 2011 to agree the Terms of Reference and programme of work over the coming months to resolve any outstanding issues around implementation. We will continue to press for an indication of the date when the Government expects to make a final decision on the devolution of Corporation Tax.

Maze/Long Kesh

Mr Murphy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the funding application to the Special EU Programmes Board for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at Maze/Long Kesh.

(AQO 729/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A grant application for EU funding under the Peace III Programme has been made to Special EU Programmes Body to support the capital costs for the proposed Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at Maze/Long Kesh. The application is currently being processed and a decision is expected late November 2011.

We are unable to disclose the details requested until a decision on the funding application is made later this year. The reason for this is that the EU Programmes Body treat funding applications as confidential and it is their standard practice not to release papers until a decision is made.

Child Poverty Delivery Implementation Plan

Mr Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the Child Poverty Delivery Implementation Plan. **(AQO 731/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: During the third meeting of the re-established Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum, which took place on 27 October 2011, members considered a draft version of an Outcomes Model to drive progress of the Plan towards eradicating child poverty here.

Some further development work will now be undertaken by the Junior Ministers, departmental officials and stakeholders in advance of a draft Action Plan and Outcomes Model being issued for public consultation.

10-year Strategy for Children and Young People

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proposals are being considered for improving the delivery of the 10-year Strategy for Children and Young People in order to increase cross-departmental support, co-operation and ownership. **(AQO 732/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are now at the half-way point of the 10 Year Strategy and we are keen to take this opportunity to consider how best we can support and streamline work across government to deliver improved outcomes for children.

A key element of this work is reviewing the structures we have in place to support delivery.

We recognise that many children and young people's issues are cross-cutting and require co-operation across Executive departments and that is why we want to ensure there is a strong Ministerial Sub-Committee to drive forward priorities and link key areas of work.

In order to inform discussion, Junior Ministers are having bilateral meetings with Ministerial colleagues in DOJ, DE, DHSSPS, DSD and DARD to discuss how we can better link work on strategies and policies specific to children and their contribution to the delivery of the 10 Year Strategy.

Junior Ministers will be discussing further options with the full Ministerial Sub-Committee at the next meeting which is currently being scheduled.

Budget Review Group

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the success of the Budget Review Group. **(AQW 4669/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Budget Review Group has played an important role in developing the Budget 2011-15 and in the identification and continuing assessment of initiatives which have the potential to provide additional resources for the Executive.

We are committed to sustaining the work of the Group and its contribution to the Executive's economic and financial considerations.

Programme for Government

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the development of a financial capability strategy to support individuals, encourage resilience and build consumer confidence, has not been included in the Programme for Government. **(AQW 4717/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government (PfG) (2011-15), which was published on 17 November 2011, represents a visible commitment by the Executive to address the issues facing our society. In this way it will provide the groundwork for economic and social recovery.

Addressing poverty and disadvantage is a priority in the PfG which includes a number of commitments and programmes to address need. Consultation on these programmes will identify the range and types of services required.

By its nature, the PfG is strategic and focuses on key issues. The PfG cannot, therefore, include specific references to every initiative which is being undertaken.

The draft PfG has now been published for public consultation and we welcome input from consultees.

Programme for Government

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the findings of the Final Delivery Report on the 2008-2011 Programme for Government.
(Aqw 4719/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A draft of the final delivery Report in respect of the Programme for Government 2008-11 is currently under consideration by Ministers across all departments. Once comments have been received, the draft will be considered by the Executive. Subject to the Executive's agreement, the report would then be made available on the Executive's website.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

National Ploughing Championships in the Republic of Ireland

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to Aqw 2780/11-15, whether she had use of the Ministerial vehicle to bring her to the National Ploughing Championships in the Republic of Ireland.
(Aqw 4033/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): As I was on official business I had the use of my Ministerial car to travel to and from the National Ploughing Championships.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what representations her Department intends to make to the European Union on Common Agricultural Policy reform.
(Aqw 4149/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The publication of legislative proposals on 12 October 2011 marked the beginning of the formal negotiations on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2013. Currently, I am consulting with stakeholders with a view to informing my position for the negotiations ahead. I want the views of stakeholders in the north of Ireland to be clearly heard throughout the CAP debate. This requires building alliances within the EU and influencing the EU Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

I have already taken a number of steps to influence the negotiations. This includes attending the October and the November EU Agriculture Council meetings, which marked the beginning of the formal consideration of the proposals. I have also met Commissioner Ciolos and was able to raise concerns with him about 'greening' and implementing the 'active' farmer test. Other important issues were raised including the need for a more adequate share of Pillar II funding. This was a very beneficial discussion, but we are at an early stage of the CAP reform process and more work needs to be done in order to obtain the necessary improvements to the reform proposals.

I am building a good relationship with my counterpart in the south of Ireland, Simon Coveney TD. The CAP reform proposals will continue to be discussed at the North South Ministerial Council and it is quite likely that the final reform negotiations in Europe will take place during Ireland's Presidency of the EU.

I have also held a number of meetings with Defra, Scottish and Welsh Ministers to discuss the reform proposals. The relationship between the Defra and Devolved Ministers is developing and this has seen a mature approach being taken in the negotiations thus far. We recognise that where we are in agreement, the ability to speak with one voice carries more weight.

The EU Parliament will have a co-decision role in the CAP reform process and so I will also be working with our MEP's from both the north and the south as I seek to use every avenue open to me in getting the best deal possible from the CAP negotiations.

All of the above interactions are replicated at official level and my officials are also feeding detailed views through to the EU Council Working Groups as we push our case on all fronts.

I will continue to promote our local interests in Europe robustly and am keen to receive the input of stakeholders to our recently launched consultation to assist me in this process.

UK Catch Quota Trials

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the recent UK Catch Quota trials; and what plans she has to build on the results of these trials to address the issue of fish discard.
(Aqw 4185/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The catch quota trials have been held in the North Sea and do not involve the local fishing fleet. The focus for our fleet has been on research into selective fishing gear for prawn trawlers that allows for the release of untargeted fin fish such as

cod, haddock and whiting. This fleet already employs a large Square Mesh Panel in excess of EU requirements to reduce catches of unwanted fish. Our research to date has identified improved gear that will result in even greater reductions in the catch of haddock and whiting in particular. The programme of selective gear trials will continue throughout 2012.

Construction Work: Invoices

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4330/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The proportion of invoices for construction work paid on time by my Department and Arms-Length Bodies is as follows:

	Financial Year 2009/10	Financial Year 2010/11	Financial Year 2011/12 (to end Oct 11)
DARD	93.46%	94.57%	96.44%
Arm's Length Bodies	71.15%	90.71%	96.61%

Rural Crime

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) types of rural crimes committed in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4335/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not hold statistics on rural crime. All statistical information on crime is held by the PSNI.

My officials wrote to the PSNI who stated that they do not hold specific statistics in relation to rural crime. They indicated that currently crime is recorded in line with National Recording Standards irrespective of where it occurs and therefore they cannot extract data on crimes which occur in rural areas.

Rural Crime

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to reduce rural crime, particularly the theft of agricultural machinery.

(AQW 4336/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the increasing number of thefts on farms and the concern it is causing amongst the farming community. My predecessor met with the Minister of Justice late last year to discuss issues relating to the increasing levels of rural crime including, in particular, agriculture related crime. My officials have liaised with colleagues in the Department of Justice to ensure that issues relating to rural crime are reflected in the development of the Rural White Paper.

I welcome local initiatives by Community Safety Partnerships to prevent rural crime, such as trailer marking and the forensic marking of sheep, and acknowledge the role Rural Watch schemes have in improving community safety. I am encouraged that following a recent meeting between the PSNI and the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) a single point of contact has been established and that representatives from the UFU have addressed a training seminar for Crime Prevention Officers. I also welcome the work streams being developed by the PSNI and An Garda Síochána under the Cross Border Strategy to prevent rural crime.

I would encourage farmers to participate in these initiatives and continue to ensure that they secure their properties by taking steps to minimise the risk of theft from their farms

Velton Lawns, Laurelvale, County Armagh

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will provide funding for the construction of a flood defence wall to ensure the safety of property at Velton Lawns, Laurelvale, Co. Armagh.

(AQW 4337/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following flooding at Laurelvale my Rivers Agency quickly carried out works to reduce the likelihood of flooding. Rivers Agency has also identified a flood alleviation scheme to further reduce the risk of flooding.

While I have made an additional £1m available for flood alleviation and my Rivers Agency continues to bid for funding as opportunities arise, we have to prioritise what limited funds are available. Given the Agency's existing capital programme, the current available capital allocation and competing priorities, the scheme at Laurelvale is unlikely to start construction within the current budget period which ends in 2015.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to ensure that exclusions from single farm payments as a result of acreage covered by trees and hedges do not lead to the uprooting of hedges and felling of trees.

(AQW 4380/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The rules relating to the eligibility of land when trees and hedges are present are different. In general, land covered by trees is ineligible for SFP purposes (though there are some circumstances when it can be eligible), while hedges are eligible for SFP provided their width does not exceed two metres from the centre measured at the base.

Measures are already in place to prevent the uprooting of trees and hedges.

The provisions of Good Agriculture and Environmental Condition (GAEC) 6 (Protection of Habitats (Wildlife Areas), Archaeological Sites and Permanent Pasture) prevents the reclamation without prior permission from DARD of semi-natural habitats. These include broad leaved woodland which is defined as areas where vegetation is dominated by broadleaved trees containing less than 15% conifers.

In addition, in relation to protection for hedges and trees that form part of a field boundary, under GAEC 5 (Field Boundaries) farmers must not remove field boundaries without prior written permission from DARD as field boundaries provide valuable shelter for stock, nesting cover for birds and food for wildlife.

If at inspection, breaches of scheme rules relating to eligibility or cross-compliance matters are identified, penalties will be applied.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the Sea Fish Industry Authority is a statutory body established under the Fisheries Act 1981 and that it is funded from fish landings across the UK, why has she not met with the organisation's Chief Executive.

(AQW 4404/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Defra and the Devolved Administrations have been involved in a discussion process with stakeholders on the future of Seafish which ended on 16 November. Ministers will consider and reflect on the views of Stakeholders before making final decisions. I will consider if a meeting is appropriate at that time.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the Sea Fish Industry Authority is a statutory body established under the Fisheries Act 1981 and that it is funded from fish landings across the UK, how she has co-operated with it for the benefit of the local fishing industry.

(AQW 4405/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department co-operates with Seafish through participation in joint governance arrangements for the Authority, with Defra and the other Devolved Administrations. My Department also co-funds a number of Seafish projects that are of benefit to the local fishing industry.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to outline any engagement that her Department has had with the Sea Fish Industry Authority over the last five years; (ii) whether her Department has made any financial contribution to the Authority's operation during this period; and (iii) whether any grants or other contributions have been made by the Authority to fishing operations in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 4407/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has engaged with Seafish in the following ways over the past five years. Officials have met with the Chair and Chief Executive on two occasions and participated in the recent discussion with industry on the future of Seafish that concluded on the 16th November. DARD has been involved, along with the other administrations, in approving the Authority's annual accounts and annual report. My Department is involved in the process of Board Appointments which are agreed jointly by Fisheries Ministers. In 2009, DARD led on the appointment process for a local representative to the Seafish Board.

My Department has also contributed to several Seafish projects that have local impact.

DARD does not provide financial support for Seafish's operational costs. These are met from a levy on the first sale of seafood landed in Britain and the north of Ireland. However the Department, over the last five years has contributed financially to nine Seafish led initiatives that benefit the local industry through the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) and European Fisheries Fund (EFF). This amounted to a total of £404k, of which £114k was national funding and £290k was European.

Seafish has not provided grants to our local industry but has contributed to 6 industry focused projects including fishermen's safety training, fisheries accreditation scheme and the fishing industry training programme. Seafish contributed a total of £134k to these projects over the last five years.

EU Infraction Fines

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the EU infraction fines, stemming from issues concerning agriculture, rivers and water, that could potentially be levied against her Department.

(AQW 4478/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In carrying out its functions the Department must ensure that it complies with the obligations of a broad range of EU Directives. Failure to transpose an EU Directive or failure to implement it in a way that the European Commission considers to be compliant could result in infraction proceedings.

Infractions are the legal process by which the European Commission takes action against a Member State for breach of its obligations under EU Law. Infraction fines are imposed by the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

DARD has never received a fine in relation to infraction proceedings.

Flooding at Beragh, County Tyrone

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much the review into the flooding at Beragh, County Tyrone is expected to cost.

(AQW 4496/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I consider that a quick review is essential while the events are fresh in people's minds. That is why I have asked my Assembly Private Secretary Pat Doherty MP, MLA to undertake the investigation into the October 2011 flooding, including that in Beragh, and report to me by 18 November 2011. As all of the data and analysis that will be required for the review is already being collated by my Rivers Agency as a matter of course, the only additional input of resource is the time devoted to this review by my Assembly Private Secretary. The cost of the review to the public purse will therefore be extremely low.

Beragh Flood Alleviation Scheme

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development from where the £1m funding for the Beragh Flood Alleviation Scheme will come.

(AQW 4605/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As a result of the flooding events during October 2011, I have asked that my department examine and re-prioritise its capital expenditure budget available for the next financial year. Consequently, the additional £1million funding will be made available to my Rivers Agency to help with flood defences for areas such as Beragh.

Agri-food

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the action he is taking to increase skills within the agri-food sector.

(AQO 818/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recognise the importance of increasing the skills level in the agri-food sector. The investment in education and skills is an essential ingredient to assist the industry in meeting the challenges and opportunities now and into the future.

My Department, through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, continues to develop and deliver a portfolio of programmes designed to increase the skills of those entering and in the agri-food sector. These programmes include Further and Higher Education, Industry Training, Knowledge and Technology Transfer and Benchmarking.

I am pleased that there has been an increased demand for all of CAFRE's agri-food programmes. This year enrolments on agriculture and food FE and HE programmes are at historically high levels with over 1000 students enrolled. The Industry Training Programme has also had considerable support from industry with over 13,000 people participating.

CAFRE has also developed the skills level of people through encouraging the adoption of technology and benchmarking their business performance. This has resulted in 1250 businesses adopting new technologies 900 businesses benchmarking their performance last year.

The NI Rural Development Programme also provides opportunity for Farm Family members to increase skills through the Skills Training element of the Farm Family Options programme. Over £2 million is available over the lifetime of the Rural Development Programme. The Supply Chain Development Programme which supports farmers working together with others provides funding for training to help each group achieve its goals. £300,000 has been earmarked for this element of Supply Chain training.

I am committed to ensuring the agri-food sector is provided with highly skilled people to improve our competitiveness in the marketplace.

Rural Crime

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the Minister of Justice on the levels of rural crime.

(AQO 790/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have recently written to both the Minister of Justice and the Chief Constable seeking meetings to discuss the results of the recent Rural Crime Survey which indicated that there has been a 28% rise in thefts from farms here over the last two years.

My predecessor also met with the Minister of Justice late last year to discuss a number of issues including rural crime and to seek to ensure that issues relating to rural crime are reflected in the development of the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

I have also written to the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána in relation to the recent attacks on Loughs Agency staff carrying out their enforcement duties in the Foyle and Carlingford Areas.

Single Farm Payments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to a supplementary question on AQO 784/11-15, what measures she will introduce to ensure the efficient payment of Single Farm Payments; and what flexibility she will introduce to enable these payments to be made without the delays caused by mapping systems.

(AQW 4853/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have introduced a number of measures to ensure the efficient payment of Single Farm Payment. These include improvements to the on-line facility and the introduction of new technology and guidance to allow the assessment and processing of information found at inspection. Work is also underway to allow the use of satellite imagery for some inspections in 2012.

In addition, the new maps when combined with more frequent aerial photography will, in due course, increase the efficiency of payment processing.

As far as 2011 payments are concerned, I do not envisage that the new maps will delay these payments and I anticipate that last year's target of 83% of payments by the end of December will be equalled. I will be monitoring the situation very closely in regard to 2012 payments. The issue of new maps may challenge the efficiency of payments in that year to some extent; because of the need for adjustments to maps and the impact this would have on the speed with which payments can be validated. The Department will invest in additional resourcing to seek as far as possible to mitigate this.

Rural Anti-poverty Strategy

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she intends to bring forward a Rural Anti-Poverty Strategy.

(AQO 788/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under DARD's Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework a package worth £10m was successfully implemented over the 2008 to 2011 budget period providing targeted support to the vulnerable in rural areas. The approval for the new budget period up until 2015 confirmed an enhancement to the commitment to tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas raising expenditure to around £16 million over the budget period. £3 million of this support has been allocated to the current financial year, with the remaining £13 million allocated up to 2015, and it is this £13 million figure that has been reflected in the draft Programme for Government published last week.

My officials are working on a revised framework for this period. This will build on and enhance the good work carried out under the previous framework and I hope to have a draft of this by the end of the year.

Support for rural anti-poverty measures is currently being provided under the 2008-2011 framework in areas such as access to benefit and services, rural transport and support services to vulnerable groups such as the elderly and isolated. We hope to build on and enhance these measures in the updated framework.

Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the benefits of the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme and how it will be progressed over the remainder of the Rural Development Programme period.

(AQO 789/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The agri-food processing sector has demonstrated an ability to continue to grow, even in the current economic downturn and it continues to be a major employer in the rural communities of the north of Ireland. I believe that there are further opportunities for growth within the sector, and the capital support provided through the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme will help agri-food processing companies to invest in their buildings and plant and machinery to develop their businesses and remain competitive, growing their market share and maintaining employment levels.

For the current CSR period to 31 March 2015, I was successful in securing national expenditure of £5.7m which when matched with the EU contribution will provide grant assistance of £11.4million to 31 March 2015. I hope therefore that the funding which is currently available will be rolled out to the sector over the coming years with the scheme re-opening for new applications either towards the end of 2011 or early 2012.

Since the first applications for the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme were approved in July 2008, my Department has paid out grant of £5.3million. With a maximum grant rate of 40%, this represents investments by the companies of at least £13.25million.

Common Agricultural Policy: Greening

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the greening element of the Common Agricultural Policy proposals.

(AQO 791/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: First of all, I should point out that I totally agree that as well as supporting farm incomes, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must deliver for the environment. Indeed it already does so through Cross Compliance and our Agri-Environment Schemes. The main difficulty from the greening proposals stems from the fact that they are intended to be common across the EU. But agricultural practices and land use varies greatly from region to region. The greening proposals are aimed at the arable sector but in the north of Ireland, the arable sector is relatively small. The impact is likely to be that arable production will shrink further, creating a move towards a grass monoculture which would be undesirable from an environmental point of view. Some of the greening proposals such as the requirement to retain permanent grassland will unnecessarily restrict farmers in their ability to shape their business according to market needs and thereby have an adverse impact on agricultural competitiveness. Another concern is that there will be a significant administrative burden both for farmers and the Department in implementing these measures.

To sum up, I am not against a CAP that delivers for the environment, but the greening proposals need considerable work to ensure that they actually deliver environmental benefits, do not hinder the development of a competitive agricultural industry and can be implemented without disproportionate cost.

Agrifood

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the potential for the agri-food sector and its development on an all-island basis.

(AQO 792/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Despite the global recession, the agri-food sector has demonstrated continued growth and resilience with local food companies having increased export sales. It is this market in particular where I believe that the sector has the potential to grow further and to grasp the opportunities arising from the continued expansion of the global population.

To ensure that the sector is well placed to exploit these opportunities I, along with the DETI Minister, agreed that we need a strategic long term approach to plan the sector's expansion. This will be developed by a Food Strategy Board, which I hope will be in place in the New Year. It is worth pointing out that success will depend on a team effort and I envisage a key role for industry in helping to shape this strategy, identify challenging but realistic growth targets and finally, it will be important to monitor achievement of those targets.

Of course, on an all-island basis, the sector faces many of the same challenges and opportunities and where we have areas of common interest I believe that it makes sense to work together. In particular I believe there would be potential benefits to an all-island approach to the marketing of local products in the export market and I look forward to working closely with my Dublin counterpart Simon Coveney TD and Executive colleagues here to help create the right conditions for the development of the agri-food sector.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Arts and Creative Industries

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has identified ways of working in partnership with the education sector to use the arts and creative industries to encourage adult and child literacy.

(AQW 4064/11-15)

Mrs Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Arts Council's 5 year plan (2007-2012) identifies education and lifelong learning as a particular focus. The Council supports a number of arts organisations and programmes which work in partnership with the education sector to use the arts to encourage adult and child literacy. Examples include:

- The Derry Playhouse Arts & Literacy Project – this was a 3 year project funded by the Department of Employment & Learning which was completed in March 2011. It targeted young people not in education or training and with literacy challenges, and prisoners aged over 19 in HMP Magilligan.
- The Derry Playhouse Mach 1 Achievers & Fountain Youth Project – this project provided training in theatre skills for 24 young people all of whom had experience of issues linked to suicide. Modules were delivered at Open College Network.
- Cahoots NI Math-a-Magic project directly links to the Curriculum Key Stage 2. It provides children with opportunities to develop numeracy and literacy skills.

DCAL provides annual funding, through NI Screen, for three Creative Learning Centres - the Nerve Centre in Derry; Studio On at Crossnacreevy, Castlereagh; and the SELB's Amma Centre in Armagh.

The Centres work closely with schools, teachers and the Education and Library Boards in providing support for the literacy agenda in schools. This is achieved through the development of critical skills in digital storytelling, film-making and other creative digital technologies. This literacy support is complemented by film screenings and workshops offered to schools, young people and community groups as part of the annual Cinemagic Screen Festival for young people and the Foyle Film Festival Education Programme. Both Festivals are funded by DCAL through NI Screen.

In addition, teachers are using film as a support for literacy as part of the after school FILMCLUB scheme. This initiative is part of a UK-wide scheme funded in the north of Ireland by DCAL through NI Screen. FILMCLUB allows children, in 68 Extended

Service schools, to watch films each week and to write film reviews which they upload to the FILMCLUB website to share with other young people. Teachers report that participation in FILMCLUB enhances literacy and ICT skills.

DCAL: Air Travel Costs

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the total cost incurred by her Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4412/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the period January to December 2010, my Department spent £10,464 on air travel between the North of Ireland and Heathrow Airport. In the same period, £7,997 was spent on air travel between the North of Ireland and other airports in England, Scotland & Wales excluding Heathrow.

Sport NI's Lottery Funding

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when Sport NI's Lottery funding will reopen for applications.

(AQW 4501/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The National Lottery is a Reserved matter and decisions on Lottery programmes rests with the individual lottery distributors. Sport NI advise that historical programmes which still receive funding from Lottery are closed to new applications. Sport NI is however currently developing new programmes to be funded from Lottery. These new programmes are expected to be launched in the years 2012-2014.

Sporting Projects: Funding

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the funding her Department has earmarked for sporting projects in each Belfast constituency in the 2011-15 budgetary period.

(AQW 4503/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of funding. Sport NI does not hold information on a constituency basis, however, it has earmarked £110,601,621 in the 2011-15 budgetary period for sporting projects in the district council areas that make up the Belfast constituencies. A breakdown of this figure by council area is provided below:

Belfast City Council

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
Stadium Development	£1m	£20m	£20m	£69m	£110m
Stadia Safety Programme	£431,300	0	0	0	£431,300
Sport Matters Capital Equipment	£30,000	0	0	0	£30,000
Awards for Sport	£77,283	0	0	0	£77,283
Totals	£1,538,583	£20m	£20m	£69m	£110,538,583

Castlereagh Borough Council

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
Awards for Sport	£13,430	0	0	0	£13,430
Totals	£13,430	0	0	0	£13,430

Lisburn City Council

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
Awards for Sport	£47,366	0	0	0	£47,366
Totals	£47,366	0	0	0	£47,366

Newtownabbey Borough Council

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
Awards for Sport	£2,242	0	0	0	£2,242
Totals	£2,242	0	0	0	£2,242

Furthermore, Sport NI has allocated a budget of £10.25m for its Community Capital Programme during the current CSR period. A total of 141 applications for funding were received under this programme, 31 of which are from the Belfast, Castlereagh, Lisburn and Newtownabbey council areas. Applications under this programme are currently being considered by Sport NI.

Upper Bann: Illegal Fishing

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3404/11-15, how many people have been identified as being engaged in illegal fishing activities in Upper Bann as a result of (i) regular patrols; (ii) intelligence led operations; and (iii) inspections of fish dealers' premises and businesses, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4519/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below details the number of persons convicted of fisheries offences in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last three years;

Year	Number of persons convicted
2008	6
2009	19
2010	16

The manner in which this information is recorded does not facilitate the designation of the original detection to either regular patrols or intelligence led operations.

There were no convictions in the Upper Bann constituency as a result of inspections of fish dealers' premises and businesses in those three years.

Líofa Campaign

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether as part of her preparations for the launch of the Líofa campaign what consideration she gave to its impact on the public perception of Irish that every word of Irish spoken is like another bullet being fired in the struggle for Irish freedom.

(AQW 4521/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Líofa initiative is about the present and the future of the Irish Language. It is intended to move the language forward in a positive, progressive and inclusive manner.

Arts Council's Support for Organisations Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support organisations in the North Down area have received from the Arts Council's Support for Organisations Programme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4534/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following support has been provided to organisations in the North Down area through the Annual Support for Organisation Programme:

Year	Amount
2009/2010	£110,550
2010/2011	£150,550
2011/2012	£150,550

DCAL: Disciplinary Action

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of staff in her Department who have been subject to disciplinary action in this year to date; (ii) the nature of the disciplinary action; and (iii) the outcome of that action.

(AQW 4542/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has had one member of staff who has been subject to disciplinary action between 1 January 2011 and 16 November 2011. I am unable to supply the further information requested as this could lead to the possible identification of the officer concerned and would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Loughbrickland Lake: Purpose-Built Weed Cutting Machine

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to publish the business case for the purpose-built weed cutting machine used for Loughbrickland Lake; and for her assessment of this business case.

(AQW 4543/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not retain a copy of the business case for the weed cutting machine used at Loughbrickland Lake. The machine was purchased approximately 17 years ago, which was prior to the creation of DCAL.

Lough Neagh: Illegal Salmon Fishing

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any correspondence she has received about illegal salmon fishing in Lough Neagh in the last twelve months from (i) the Ulster Angling Federation; (ii) Lough Neagh fishermen; and (iii) other parties; and what action she has taken.

(AQW 4544/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I was appointed Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on 16 May 2011 and since then I have received the following correspondence relating to illegal fishing in Lough Neagh from the following organisations:

- (i) Ulster Angling Federation:
One letter from the Ulster Angling Federation, ref. COR/1234/2011
One request for a meeting, ref. INV/1404/2011
- (ii) Lough Neagh Fishermen:
One letter from Lough Neagh Fishermen, ref. COR/1170/2011
- (iii) Other Parties:
One request for a meeting, ref. INV/1259/2011

I responded to all the letters and I was unable to meet with the UAF due to diary commitments. I agreed to meet with the other party but due to unforeseen circumstances I could not attend and the meeting went ahead with departmental officials.

Illegal Fishing

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what powers her Department has in relation to the removal of nets which are being used for illegal fishing; and whether she intends to seek further powers to tackle illegal fishing.

(AQW 4545/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has a range of powers under the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 and subsequent regulations in relation to the removal of nets involved in illegal fishing activities. These powers relate to the type and construction of nets, the manner in which they are used, the placement of nets, when they are used and the type and size of fish caught.

It is considered that the current powers for removal of nets are adequate but this position is reviewed periodically.

Lisnaskea Library

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether a new build for Lisnaskea library is a priority in her Department's capital budget for 2011/12; and (ii) to detail the libraries and related projects that are benefiting from this year's capital budget, including both new builds and refurbishments.

(AQW 4608/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Project to provide a replacement library in Lisnaskea is currently not included in Libraries NI's capital budget for 2011/2012. The Project remains a priority for Libraries NI if funding were to become available.

The following table details library projects that are benefiting from this year's capital budget;

Location	Project Cost (£)
Ardoyne Library	10,000
Ballymena Administrative Centre	15,000
Belfast Central	114,499
Brownlow Library	134,000
Dromore Library	6,000
Dungannon Library	498,000
Dungiven Library	21,867
Falls Library	306,000
Finaghy Library	17,100
Irvinestown Library	5,000
Larne Library	50,000
Lisburn Library	114,000
Lurgan Library	40,000
Maghera Library	5,000
Ormeau Road Library	170,000
Portadown Library	21,134
Shankill Library	319,000
Tandragee Library	5,900

Location	Project Cost (£)
Various – Fire Risk Assessment	64,000
Vehicle Replacement	387,500
Total	£2,304,000

GAA: Illegal Use of Facilities

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that some GAA grounds have been misused to commemorate terrorist activities, whether she will attach any conditions to future funding prohibiting the political use of GAA facilities.

(AQW 4630/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The use of GAA grounds, including determining whether misuse has occurred, is not a matter for me but entirely a matter for the GAA to determine in accordance with the policies of the Association. SportNI (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in the north of Ireland including attaching any conditions to current or future funding. SNI currently operates an equality scheme which requires all recipients of funding, including the GAA, to operate an equal opportunities policy and to take all reasonable steps to ensure that their facilities and services are run in an inclusive manner which will both aspire to and promote good relations. All applicants to SNI programmes, including the GAA, are required to adhere to these conditions in order to receive, and continue to receive, funding.

Salmon Catches on the North Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the returns made this year for salmon catches on the north coast by each boat licensed to operate drift nets.

(AQW 4637/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The catch returns for the 2011 season for each boat licensed by DCAL to operate drift nets off the north coasts are as follows:

- Boat 1 – 192 salmon
- Boat 2 – 35 salmon

Salmon Catches on the North Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the returns made this year for salmon catches on the north coast by people operating bag nets.

(AQW 4638/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The catch returns for the 2011 season for each bag net licensed by DCAL and operating off the north coast are as follows:

- Ballyteerim – 345 salmon
- Torr Head – 494 salmon, 1 sea trout

Sports Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding her Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4640/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of funding. In the last three financial years, Sport NI has allocated a total of £38,212,220 to rugby, association football, Gaelic games and motorsport. A breakdown of this figure is provided in the table below:

Sport	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Gaelic Games	£7,076,520	£8,790,721	£1,174,713	£17,041,954
Association Football	£5,566,342	£6,721,912	£3,452,905	£15,741,159
Rugby	£2,124,129	£362,080	£504,950	£2,991,159
Motorsport	£182,500	£2,087,240	£168,208	£2,437,948
Totals	£14,949,491	£17,961,953	£5,300,776	£38,212,220

Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Awards Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4388/11-15 and given the fact that the Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Awards Programme will not be available until at least 2015, what advice she can give to sporting organisations who need funding for capital and equipment above the value of £10,000 in the interim period.

(AQW 4645/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the body responsible for the development of sport in the north of Ireland. I would advise that sporting organisations seeking funding for capital and equipment above the value of £10,000 should contact Sport NI, who may be able to provide advice.

Fish Species: Protection

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4112/11-15, to detail any of her Department's programmes for the protection of fish species which are currently outside safe biological limits, including (i) any reduction in the length of the fishing season; (ii) the use of barbless hooks; (iii) the introduction of catch and release schemes; and (iv) the ending of the use of netting.

(AQW 4679/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the DCAL jurisdiction there is evidence that salmon and eel populations are currently outside safe biological limits.

My Department's programme for the conservation of salmon is contained in the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) Implementation Plan. This has 3 Focus Area Plans which detail our approach to fisheries management, (including measures to limit exploitation), habitat protection and restoration and aquaculture and introductions. These are published on the NASCO website at www.nasco.int/.

My Department's programme for the conservation of eels is contained in the 3 Eel Management Plans on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website at www.defra.gov.uk/ and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources website at www.dcenr.gov.ie/.

Fish Merchants

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4110/11-15, to detail the number of fish merchants that are licensed to buy and sell (i) salmon; (ii) trout; (iii) eels; (iv) pollen; and (iv) pike.

(AQW 4680/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are currently 169 Fish Dealers Licences issued by my Department.

These licences cover the holder to buy and sell all the types of fish specified in the question.

Licensed Fish Merchants: Inspections

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of (i) inspections of licensed fish merchants in each of the last five years; and (ii) instances where further action was required by her Department.

(AQW 4681/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The regulation of fish merchants was the responsibility of the Fisheries Conservancy Board (FCB) until it was abolished on 1 June 2009, when that responsibility moved to DCAL. No records of FCB inspections or follow up actions were transferred to the Department.

1 June 2009 - 31 March 2010

Number of Dealer Inspections - 47

Further Action - 8 Warning Letters regarding unlicensed dealing

1 April 2010 - 31 March 2011

Number of Dealer Inspections - 37

Further Action - 4 Warning Letters regarding unlicensed dealing;

1 Prosecution taken regarding non-production of dealers register (case dismissed on a point of law).

Unlicensed Selling or Buying Fish

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of prosecutions taken by her Department for the unlicensed selling or buying of (i) salmon; (ii) trout; (iii) pollen; (iv) eels; and (v) pike in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4682/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has taken no prosecutions for offences of this type in any of the last five years.

European Union: Infraction Fines

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what level of infraction fines he is anticipating being levied against the UK by the European Union due to breaches of the Habitats Directive by the interception of mixed stocks of salmon by commercial nets, which have been licensed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, on the North Coast of Antrim.

(AQW 4683/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Please see answer to AQW 4106/11-15

Lisnaskea and Irvinestown Libraries

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of how the opening hours of Lisnaskea and Irvinestown libraries can be reduced without rural proofing being carried out, given that Co. Fermanagh has only three libraries.

(AQW 4701/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A draft Rural Impact Assessment and a draft Equality Impact Assessment have already been published as part of the consultation process. These documents are available on the Libraries NI website. Consultees are invited to comment on these documents as well as through questionnaires. I understand that contact is also being made with groups representative of the Section 75 categories and of rural interests.

DARD officials have provided training to Libraries NI in relation to its revised rural proofing guidance which was published on 8 February 2011. The Rural Impact Assessment will be reviewed following the end of the consultation.

I would encourage everyone to take part in the ongoing public consultation and would emphasise that nothing has been finalised by the Libraries NI Board at this stage.

Assembly Questions: Cost

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4734/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and so the information requested is not available.

Capital Budget for 2012-13

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what is her Department's capital budget for 2012/13; (ii) which library will be the first to receive funding for a capital project in 2012/13; and (iii) whether Lisnaskea library is included in the proposed capital spend programme for 2012/13, and if so, to detail its position in the programme.

(AQW 4755/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) The Department's capital budget for 2012/13 is £34.7 million.
- (ii) From this amount Libraries NI has been set £4.166 million, broken down as follows:

Capital Investment	Total (k)
Electronic Libraries for NI(ELfNI)	£3,000,000
Essential Maintenance	£666,000
Other Capital	£500,000
Total	£4,166,000

The Board and Senior Management Team of Libraries NI has responsibility for deciding upon the utilisation of available capital funding. At this stage it is not possible to provide a sub-analysis of the £500,000.

- (iii) The bid for funding a library in Lisnaskea was not met in the four year Budget 2010 settlement, although this remains a priority for Libraries NI.

Department of Education

Children: Statemented

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what percentage of children have been statemented in each of the last three years, broken down by sector.

(AQW 4050/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of stated pupils by school management type, 2008/09 – 2010/11

School management type	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Controlled	5.8	5.9	6.0
Voluntary	0.7	0.8	0.9
RC Maintained	3.6	3.7	3.7
Other Maintained	3.1	3.0	3.0
Controlled Integrated	3.8	4.1	4.2
GMI	4.7	5.1	5.6
Total	4.1	4.2	4.3

Source: NI school census

Note: Figures relate to pupils in nursery, primary, special and post primary schools.

Figures for the controlled sector are higher because it contains 39 of the 41 special schools.

In addition to the numbers in schools listed above, there were: 0.3% of pupils in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres stated in 2008/09; 0.2% of pupils in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres stated in 2009/10; and, 0.1% of pupils in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres stated in 2010/11.

Free School Meals

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider making free school meals available to children from families in receipt of Universal Credit.

(AQW 4104/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Universal Credit will replace a number of existing benefits which are currently used to determine eligibility for free school meals and clothing allowances. These include Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and Income-related Employment and Support Allowance. It will be necessary therefore, in due course, to amend the eligibility criteria to incorporate the Universal Credit.

My Department is working closely with the Department for Social Development, which is responsible for bringing forward the necessary legislation to give effect to Universal Credit, to ensure that, as far as possible, families here are not disadvantaged by any changes.

Bangor Central Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether he would consider using the large area of open space at Castle Street, Bangor, for a new build for Bangor Central, Primary School.

(AQW 4160/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011 I announced that I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process based on each ELB area to shape the future pattern of education provision.

Previously identified projects, including that for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process in order to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. Such projects may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. No school building project will be looked at in isolation but will be considered in the context of the wider area.

Should a project for Bangor Central Primary School come forward as a result of the area planning process, all available options to deliver a new school will be considered at that stage.

Football Coaches in Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many football coaches in schools are currently funded by his Department and what is the level of funding.

(AQW 4188/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not provide any direct funding to schools specifically for football coaching. Schools may of course use their own delegated budgets to employ football coaches but the Department does not hold this level of detail.

GAA Coaches in Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many GAA coaches in schools are currently funded by his Department and what is the level of funding.

(AQW 4189/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not provide any direct funding to schools specifically for GAA coaching. Schools may of course use their own delegated budgets to employ GAA coaches but the Department does not hold this level of detail.

Rugby Coaches in Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many rugby coaches in schools are currently funded by his Department and what is the level of funding.

(AQW 4190/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not provide any direct funding to schools specifically for rugby coaching. Schools may of course use their own delegated budgets to employ rugby coaches but the Department does not hold this level of detail.

Hockey Coaches in Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many hockey coaches in schools are currently funded by his Department and what is the level of funding.

(AQW 4191/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not provide any direct funding to schools specifically for hockey coaching. Schools may of course use their own delegated budgets to employ hockey coaches but the Department does not hold this level of detail.

Netball Coaches in Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many netball coaches in schools are currently funded by his Department and what is the level of funding.

(AQW 4192/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not provide any direct funding to schools specifically for netball coaching. Schools may of course use their own delegated budgets to employ netball coaches but the Department does not hold this level of detail.

New Payroll System

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to design and procure a new payroll system.

(AQW 4217/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current contract with Northgate Arinso (NGA) covering the payrolls for non teaching staff (5 ELBs) and teachers (DE) ends in March 2013. Initial analysis on the steps required to implement a full procurement to replace the Education Sector Workforce payrolls is being considered.

The scope of the project is very wide, potentially taking in all the Finance and HR/Payroll functions within the ELBs, CCEA, CCMS, the Youth Council and the Staff Commission as well as the Teachers Payroll and the Substitute Teachers Register (NISTR).

Development Proposal 218

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of responses received in relation to Development Proposal 218 to establish a co-educational, post-16 provision at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen; and (ii) of these how many were (a) for; and (b) against the proposal.

(AQW 4218/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department received three written responses to Development Proposal 218 during the statutory two month consultation period, which ran from 4 May 2011 to 4 July 2011. All three of the responses were against the Development Proposal.

Having considered all the facts pertinent to the proposal I approved this Development Proposal primarily because it offers increased choice to girls that they would not otherwise have.

Schools Audit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools in the North Down constituency that (i) will; and (ii) will not form part of the proposed schools audit.

(AQW 4261/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The viability audit announced in my statement to the Assembly on 26 September applies to all grant-aided primary and post-primary schools of all management types in the North Down area, including any with special units. At this stage, it does not apply to nursery schools or special schools.

Primary 1 Pupils

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education whether it is widespread practice that pupils in P1 do not stay in school during lunchtime.

(AQW 4273/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Regulations prescribe the minimum hours pupils should attend school. In the case of primary schools, Regulation 20 of the Primary Schools: General Regulations 1973 No. 402 sets out the position. The regulations state that the minimum hours pupils should attend school on any day under instruction is 3 hours for pupils enrolled in a class of pupils most of whom were under the age of 8 at the start of the school year and 4.5 hours for other pupils. Boards of Governors are allowed flexibility in setting their school's starting and finishing times, as long as they comply with the regulations.

It is not a widespread practice for Year 1 pupils not to stay in school during lunchtime. The Department understands that some schools may admit pupils on a phased basis as part of their induction process in the first few weeks of the new school year. Evidence gathered through school inspections has found that a well planned and well delivered phased entry is helpful to children, however, the Department would not expect these arrangements to continue for a prolonged period. Parents should be informed of the primary school's policy on settling in as part of the application/admission process to allow them time to make suitable arrangements.

The Department is also aware that, typically, Year 1 children are introduced to school lunches during September with some waiting until after the Hallowe'en break.

Free School Meals: Primary 1 Pupils

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education whether a free school meal entitlement for pupils in P1 could be transferred to a mid-morning snack in schools which do not offer a lunch to pupils in P1.

(AQW 4275/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Free school meals are provided as part of the Arrangements for the Provision of Milk, Meals and Related Facilities made under Articles 58 and 59 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.

These arrangements require Education and Library Boards and other school authorities to provide a school dinner which is "adequate in quantity and quality so as to be suitable as the main meal of the day for a pupil". A mid-morning snack would not meet this description and the free school meal entitlement would not therefore be transferrable in these circumstances.

Schools should make arrangements to ensure that all pupils entitled to free school meals, including those in Year 1, are able to avail of this entitlement.

Náiscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, North Belfast

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposal for Náiscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, North Belfast.

(AQW 4278/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In April 2011, my predecessor, Catriona Ruane MLA, conditionally approved the provision of a 26 full-time place nursery unit at Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin.

The conditions of approval stipulate that, by September 2012, the school must fill a minimum of 20 places with children in their immediate pre-school year and my Department must be satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place to accommodate the proposed nursery unit.

Parental Engagement

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, in light of research which shows that parental engagement improves a pupil's performance regardless of socio-economic background, (i) how he plans to encourage parental engagement; and (ii) how much his Department has spent on the promotion of parental engagement in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4338/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Every School a Good School, the policy for school improvement, sets out my commitment to encouraging and supporting schools to engage parents more effectively. Count, read: succeed sets out some of the practical steps schools can take to engage parents in supporting their child's development of literacy and numeracy and includes a commitment to providing guidance to help parents of pre-school and school-age children.

The Department has supported the Bookstart programme, which provides free books to babies and toddlers, with advice for parents on reading with their child. The Sure Start Programme works jointly with both parents and young children. In recognition of the importance of a parent's role in the development of a child, a range of parenting programmes and activities are offered.

The Extended Schools programme enables schools to provide additional services aimed at raising attainment levels as well as empowering children and their families to access appropriate or specialist support to overcome the challenges that may lead to underachievement. An increasing number of extended schools have introduced a range of innovative ways to engage and involve parents more effectively in the work of the school.

The Department also funds the Belfast Education and Library Board and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to pilot two Full Service School programmes in North and West Belfast. These programmes aim to work in partnership with parents and communities to encourage and support children to realise their full potential.

The Department is in the process of revising existing reporting regulations to bring forward new arrangements for reporting pupil's progress to their parents so that they are better informed about their child's performance and to help support their child in school.

£250k per annum has been provided, via the Education and Library Boards, in support of Bookstart programme over the years 2008/09 - 2010/11. A bid to continue funding in 2011/12 is currently being considered.

It is not possible to identify specific funding for the promotion of parental engagement within the funding allocated for the other policies and programmes mentioned above.

Education and Library Boards: Surplus Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail any surplus land held by each Education and Library Board. **(AQW 4358/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have provided the following details on surplus land:

Board	Land relating to the former Asset
BELB	School of Music Building
BELB	Porters Annex
BELB	Grove Primary School
BELB	Forthriver Primary School
BELB	Old Cavehill
BELB	Denmark Street Nursery School
BELB	Mersey Street Primary School
BELB	Mount Gilbert Community College
BELB	Cedar Lodge Special School
BELB	Orangefield Campus
BELB	Mount Gilbert Caretakers residence
BELB	Fallswater Drive
BELB	Land adjacent to Ligionel Primary School
BELB	Laburnum Playing Fields
BELB	Kircubbin Sailing Club
BELB	Shore Road Playing Fields
BELB	Cairn Lodge Youth Club
BELB	Turf Lodge Youth Club
BELB	Trinity Drop-in Centre
BELB	Sydenham Youth Club
BELB	Donegall Pass Youth Club
BELB	Shankill Youth Club
WELB	Burnfoot Primary School
WELB	Dungiven Primary School
WELB	Duke of Westminster High School, Ballinamallard
WELB	Duke of Westminster High School, Kesh
WELB	Faughan Valley High School
WELB	Faughan Valley High School Kitchen and Dining Hall
NEELB	Antiville Primary School
NEELB	Ballypriormore Primary School
NEELB	Carnalridge Primary School
NEELB	Garvagh Primary School
NEELB	Glenarm Primary School
NEELB	Maghera High School
NEELB	Roddensvale
SEELB	Drumbo Primary School
SEELB	Hillhall Primary School
SEELB	Lambeg Primary School
SEELB	Lower Ballinderry Primary School
SEELB	Gransha High School

Board	Land relating to the former Asset
SEELB	Killard House General
SEELB	Ballykillaire Site
SEELB	Ballylesson site
SEELB	Newtownbreda Primary School
SEELB	Kindle Primary School
SEELB	Hilden Primary School
SEELB	Newport Primary School
SEELB	Lisnasharragh High School
SELB	Minterburn Primary School
SELB	Tamnmore Primary School
SELB	Clogher Regional Primary School

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Replacement by Commissioners

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department, to date, of the Commissioners that replaced the South Eastern Education and Library Board in 2005.

(AQW 4366/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has provided the following costs which include daily fees, travel, subsistence and all other expenses, made to the commissioners from 6 July 2006, when they were first appointed.

Financial Year	Costs
2006/07	£81,472
2007/08	£108,637
2008/09	£79,472
2009/10	£83,717
2010/11	£76,935
2011/12	£43,104 (up to 30 September 2011)

Ilex Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked Minister of Education, with regard to the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4390/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I met recently with Sir Roy McNulty, Chair of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company, to discuss the plan and the contribution education can make. Rather than fund short term projects, I am continuing to implement a range of policies aimed at ensuring more of our young people leave school with the skills they need to gain employment and contribute to our economic regeneration. These policies, including the school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the promotion of STEM subjects, the revised curriculum and entitlement framework and work to finalise strategies for early years and special educational needs and inclusion, will support the objectives of the One Plan for Derry.

Within the Derry area, schools, pre-school and youth settings are supported by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB), and its partners, in implementing these policies through the Achieving Derry-Bright Futures programme, which was introduced in September 2007. The Department provided funding of £360,000 in 2011/12 for the programme, which was in addition to the funding already allocated to schools and to the WELB.

Area Learning Community Programme Participation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 3985/11-15, to detail where he said or implied in his Ministerial Statement on 26 September 2011 that 'collaboration is not an end in itself'.

(AQW 4474/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The whole thrust of my Statement on 26 September related to putting the needs of pupils first; not the needs of an institution. This is the paramount objective which was clearly articulated in my Statement – and I did not set out to achieve or to advocate collaborative working as an end in itself. I accept that schools may collaborate and support each other in order to enrich the curricular offer but I am clear that the interests of pupils remain the driving force behind the introduction of the Entitlement Framework. The Sustainable Schools policy sets out an expectation that a pupil should spend at least 80% of their time in their home school.

Sentinus Programme

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) what training is given to those responsible for selecting successful candidates for the Sentinus Programme; and (ii) whether the training is mandatory for all those responsible, including a Board of Governors which may be required to make a judgement if an appeal is lodged.

(AQW 4540/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the member to my answer to his previous question AQW 3271/11-15 published in the Official Report on 21 October 2011, in which I advised that the Department has no involvement in this process and the selection of pupils to represent participating schools is entirely a matter for schools to determine.

Pupil Profile System

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the effectiveness of school reports from teachers using the electronic Pupil Profile System.

(AQW 4546/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you will be aware, there was some confusion and misinformation around the potential role of the Pupil Profile, which some incorrectly saw as playing a major role with schools in informing decisions on transfer. Therefore, to minimise confusion, since 2009 the Department has referred to "the annual report to parents" and has used that terminology in circulars to schools and parents' leaflets.

While there is no statutory requirement for the format of the annual report, the legislation specifies the minimum content which schools must include. Report writer software is available within the Assessment suite of software supplied for schools by C2K, however schools are free to use this, any other software, word processing or to handwrite reports, provided the minimum statutory content is made available to parents. C2K have offered training to all schools in the use of the report writer.

Pupils in Kinship Care

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how his Department looks after the needs of pupils in Kinship Care, including (i) pastoral care; and (ii) parent/guardian consent for extra-curricular activities.

(AQW 4547/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As well as their statutory responsibilities in relation to pupils' learning, schools have pastoral responsibilities towards their pupils, including those in kinship care. Pastoral care arrangements must include and be reflected through specific policies on child protection, pupil discipline and anti-bullying. My Department has provided guidance on what these policies should address. The operation and effectiveness of pastoral care arrangements is monitored through the regular cycle of school inspections undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

Health and Social Services Trusts are responsible for the delegation of authority to foster carers in Northern Ireland. DHSSPS circular CCPD01/10 sets out the guidance that Trusts are required to follow in considering the delegation of authority to foster carers including kinship and respite carers. A 'Trust Authority to Delegate Consent' is individually assessed for each case and a signed copy should be made available to a child/young person's school and may cover many extra-curricular activities.

Statistics show that looked after children continue to be significantly outperformed by their peers in the general school population. Educational attainment is an important predictor of success in later life and one of the key education priorities is closing the gap and increasing access and equity.

My Department, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Health and Social Care Board, Health and Social Care Trusts and the Education and Library Boards, with the support of a number of voluntary sector organisations, have been working together to develop a standardised regional personal education plan for all looked after children of statutory school age. This Plan will establish clear targets and actions to respond effectively to each child's needs and provide a continuous record of their achievements. The introduction of these plans will begin in December 2011. It is hoped that these children and young people will be facilitated to fully develop their individual educational capacity, which will help with their future employability and general well-being.

School Transport Costs

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to 4097/11-15, why his Department does not hold the information requested on the cost of transporting pupils between schools.

(AQW 4560/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department delegates a budget to schools for which Principals are accountable, including how best they can meet the needs of their pupils in the planning and delivery of the statutory curriculum. This delegated authority enables Principals, having full regard to their responsibility to their pupils, to determine when their pupils will benefit from accessing a course in another school, taking account of individual pupil needs and any transport requirements.

My Department does not hold information requested on the number of pupils being transported between schools or the associated costs and has no wish to add to the administrative burden of schools by requesting it.

School Transport

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils transported between schools in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) mode of transport; and (ii) areas of partnership.

(AQW 4561/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department delegates a budget to schools for which Principals are accountable, including how best they can meet the needs of their pupils in the planning and delivery of the statutory curriculum. This delegated authority enables Principals, having full regard to their responsibility to their pupils, to determine when their pupils will benefit from accessing a course in another school, taking account of individual pupil needs and any transport requirements.

My Department does not hold information requested on the number of pupils being transported between schools or the associated costs and has no wish to add to the administrative burden of schools by requesting it.

Free School Meals

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what percentage of children in primary schools in the controlled sector, in each of the last four years (i) received; and (ii) qualified for free school meals.

(AQW 4580/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of pupils who received and qualified for free school meals in Controlled Primary Schools, 2007/08 – 2010/11

Year	Controlled primary (excluding controlled integrated)		Controlled Integrated primary		Total Controlled primary	
	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified
2007/08	11.4	14.8	13.5	16.9	11.5	14.9
2008/09	11.5	14.2	11.1	17.3	11.5	14.3
2009/10	12.3	15.8	9.7	19.1	12.2	15.9
2010/11	14.8	18.9	16.7	22.0	14.9	19.0

Source: NI school census and NI school meals census

Notes:

- 1 Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes in grant-aided primary schools.
- 2 The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. Information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers receiving meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The information presented in the table under the heading of "received" therefore includes only those children who received a school meal on that day.
- 3 The free school meals eligibility criteria were extended in 2010/11, on a phased basis, to include Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils in primary schools, whose parents were in receipt of Working Tax Credit and who had an annual taxable income not exceeding £16,190.
- 4 Some Nursery units of Primary schools had not introduced all pupils to school by the Census date, so, although counted in the enrolment figures, the numbers taking a school meal may be lower than if collected later in the year.
- 5 Reception and Primary 1 pupils in some schools only attend for a half-day session until the end of October which may not include time for a midday meal.

Free School Meals

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what percentage of children in primary schools in the maintained sector, in each of the last four years (i) received; and (ii) qualified for free school meals.

(AQW 4581/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of pupils who received and qualified for free school meals in Maintained Primary Schools, 2007/08 – 2010/11

Year	Catholic Maintained primary		Other Maintained primary		Total Maintained primary	
	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified
2007/08	18.6	21.3	16.2	27.8	18.6	21.5
2008/09	18.1	20.7	15.9	26.6	18.0	20.9
2009/10	19.2	22.3	15.5	28.3	19.1	22.5

Year	Catholic Maintained primary		Other Maintained primary		Total Maintained primary	
	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified
2010/11	22.0	25.4	24.5	33.9	22.1	25.7

Source: NI school census and NI school meals census

Note:

- 1 Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes in grant-aided primary schools.
- 2 The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. Information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers receiving meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The information presented in the table under the heading of “received” therefore includes only those children who received a school meal on that day.
- 3 The free school meals eligibility criteria were extended in 2010/11, on a phased basis, to include Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils in primary schools, whose parents were in receipt of Working Tax Credit and who had an annual taxable income not exceeding £16,190.
- 4 Some Nursery units of Primary schools had not introduced all pupils to school by the Census date, so, although counted in the enrolment figures, the numbers taking a school meal may be lower than if collected later in the year.
- 5 Reception and Primary 1 pupils in some schools only attend for a half-day session until the end of October which may not include time for a midday meal.

Free School Meals

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils in post-primary schools in the controlled sector, in each of the last four years (i) received; and (ii) qualified for free school meals.

(AQW 4582/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of pupils who received and qualified for free school meals in Controlled Post-Primary Schools, 2007/08 – 2010/11

Year	Controlled Post-primary (excluding Controlled Integrated)		Controlled Integrated Post- primary		Total Controlled post- primary	
	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified
2007/08	9.9	14.6	13.1	22.0	10.1	15.0
2008/09	9.6	14.1	13.2	18.6	9.7	14.3
2009/10	10.3	15.2	8.8	20.0	10.2	15.4
2010/11	11.1	15.9	12.0	20.5	11.2	16.2

Source: NI school census and NI school meals census

Note:

- 1 The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. Information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers receiving meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The information presented in the table under the heading of “received” therefore includes only those children who received a school meal on that day.

Free School Meals

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils in post- primary schools in the maintained sector, in each of the last four years (i) received; and (ii) qualified for free school meals.

(AQW 4583/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the tables below.

Percentage of pupils who received and qualified for free school meals in Maintained Post-Primary Schools, 2007/08 – 2010/11

Year	Catholic Maintained post-primary		Other Maintained post-primary		Total Maintained post-primary	
	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified	% received	% qualified
2007/08	24.1	30.5	25.9	39.5	24.1	30.6
2008/09	22.4	29.8	24.0	35.3	22.4	29.9
2009/10	24.3	30.8	20.1	32.6	24.2	30.8
2010/11	24.5	31.1	27.1	33.1	24.5	31.2

Source: NI school census and NI school meals census

Note:

1 The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. Information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers receiving meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The information presented in the table under the heading of “received” therefore includes only those children who received a school meal on that day.

Free School Meals

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last four years, what percentage of pupils, with five GCSEs or less, in post-primary schools in the controlled sector (i) received; and (ii) qualified for free school meals, broken down by constituency. **(AQW 4584/11-15)**

Mr O’Dowd: The Department does not hold information on the uptake of free school meals in any pupil level examination dataset that would be required to answer part (i) of the question. Therefore this information is unavailable.

The answer to part (ii) is in the tables below.

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the controlled sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2006/07

	Controlled		Controlled Integrated		Total Controlled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	#	#	*	*	40	40.8
Belfast North	33	37.5	0	0	33	37.1
Belfast South	26	48.1	0	0	26	47.3
Belfast West	23	41.8	0	0	23	41.8
East Antrim	27	30.0	0	0	27	30.0
East Derry	17	25.0	0	0	17	25.0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	25	22.9	0	0	25	22.9
Foyle	44	30.6	0	0	44	30.6
Lagan Valley	#	#	*	*	26	44.1
Mid Ulster	14	33.3	0	0	14	33.3
Newry And Armagh	12	34.3	0	0	12	34.3
North Antrim	35	28.0	0	0	35	28.0
North Down	14	25.5	7	58.3	21	31.3
South Antrim	20	24.4	0	0.0	20	21.3
South Down	9	27.3	5	83.3	14	35.9
Strangford	#	#	*	*	18	23.1
Upper Bann	19	33.3	8	33.3	27	33.3
West Tyrone	29	56.9	0	0.0	29	56.9
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	10	30.3	0	0.0	10	29.4
Total	434	32.4	27	36.5	461	32.6

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the controlled sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2007/08

	Controlled		Controlled Integrated		Total Controlled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	#	#	*	*	32	28.3
Belfast North	35	35.4	0	0.0	35	35.4
Belfast South	18	34.6	0	0.0	18	34.6
Belfast West	9	25.7	0	0.0	9	25.7
East Antrim	20	29.4	0	0.0	20	29.4
East Derry	16	26.7	0	0.0	16	26.7
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	14	16.5	0	0.0	14	16.5
Foyle	24	35.3	0	0.0	24	35.3
Lagan Valley	#	#	*	*	17	25.8
Mid Ulster	14	15.7	0	0.0	14	15.7
Newry And Armagh	#	#	*	*	11	28.2
North Antrim	41	37.6	0	0.0	41	37.6
North Down	17	26.2	*	*	20	27.8
South Antrim	15	23.1	0	0.0	15	21.7
South Down	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
Strangford	15	19.7	0	0.0	15	19.7
Upper Bann	21	29.2	10	66.7	31	35.6
West Tyrone	14	37.8	0	0.0	14	37.8
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	#	#	*	*	11	44.0
Total	342	27.7	19	47.5	361	28.4

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the controlled sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2008/09

	Controlled		Controlled Integrated		Total Controlled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	#	#	*	*	34	40.0
Belfast North	25	27.8	0	0.0	25	27.8
Belfast South	13	33.3	0	0.0	13	33.3
Belfast West	17	39.5	0	0.0	17	39.5
East Antrim	23	31.9	0	0.0	23	31.9
East Derry	26	49.1	0	0.0	26	49.1
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	11	19.3	0	0.0	11	19.3
Foyle	24	33.8	0	0.0	24	33.8
Lagan Valley	#	#	*	*	10	27.8
Mid Ulster	11	15.9	0	0.0	11	15.9
Newry And Armagh	6	18.8	0	0.0	6	18.8
North Antrim	22	27.2	0	0.0	22	27.2
North Down	10	31.3	0	0.0	10	27.0
South Antrim	16	22.2	0	0.0	16	19.5
South Down	5	31.3	0	0.0	5	31.3
Strangford	14	35.9	0	0.0	14	35.9
Upper Bann	#	#	*	*	26	44.1
West Tyrone	7	38.9	0	0.0	7	38.9
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	9	36.0	0	0.0	9	34.6
Total	301	31.0	8	23.5	309	30.7

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the controlled sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2009/10

	Controlled		Controlled Integrated		Total Controlled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	#	#	*	*	30	31.9
Belfast North	25	41.0	0	0	25	41.0
Belfast South	18	40.9	0	0	18	40.0
Belfast West	8	47.1	0	0	8	47.1
East Antrim	10	18.9	0	0	10	18.9
East Derry	14	36.8	0	0	14	36.8
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	7	46.7	0	0	7	46.7
Foyle	7	43.8	0	0	7	43.8
Lagan Valley	#	#	*	*	13	28.9
Mid Ulster	10	34.5	0	0	10	34.5
Newry And Armagh	7	33.3	0	0	7	33.3
North Antrim	18	28.1	0	0	18	27.3
North Down	6	17.1	*	*	#	#
South Antrim	*	*	#	#	12	21.1
South Down	7	38.9	0	0.0	7	38.9
Strangford	12	26.1	0	0.0	12	26.1
Upper Bann	#	#	*	*	17	30.9
West Tyrone	8	40.0	0	0.0	8	40.0
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
Total	219	31.8	15	26.8	234	31.5

Source: School Leavers Survey

* Denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Figure greater or equal to 5 has been treated to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Free School Meals

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last four years, what percentage of pupils, with five GCSEs or less, in post-primary schools in the maintained sector (i) received; and (ii) qualified for free school meals, broken down by constituency. **(AQW 4585/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold information on the uptake of free school meals in any pupil level examination dataset that would be required to answer part (i) of the question. Therefore this information is unavailable.

The answer to part (ii) is contained in the tables below.

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the maintained sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2006/07

	Catholic Maintained		Other Maintained		Total Maintained	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	10	90.9	0	0	10	83.3
Belfast North	39	43.8	0	0	39	43.3
Belfast South	17	70.8	0	0	17	70.8
Belfast West	#	#	*	*	75	46.3
East Antrim	*	*	0	0	*	*
East Derry	15	28.3	0	0	15	28.3
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	20	33.9	0	0	20	33.9
Foyle	125	66.5	0	0	125	66.5
Lagan Valley	5	38.5	0	0	5	38.5
Mid Ulster	29	37.2	0	0	29	37.2

	Catholic Maintained		Other Maintained		Total Maintained	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Newry And Armagh	51	47.2	0	0	51	47.2
North Antrim	9	52.9	0	0	9	52.9
North Down	*	*	0	0	*	*
South Antrim	8	23.5	0	0	8	22.9
South Down	40	32.5	0	0	40	32.5
Strangford	*	*	0	0	*	*
Upper Bann	26	34.2	0	0	26	34.2
West Tyrone	46	46.9	0	0	46	46.9
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	27	45.0	0	0	27	45.0
Total	#	#	*	*	546	44.8

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the maintained sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2007/08

	Catholic Maintained		Other Maintained		Total Maintained	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	6	75.0	0	0	6	75.0
Belfast North	#	#	*	*	22	45.8
Belfast South	13	81.3	0	0	13	81.3
Belfast West	70	42.2	5	50	75	42.6
East Antrim	*	*	0	0	*	*
East Derry	25	50.0	0	0	25	50.0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	21	34.4	0	0	21	34.4
Foyle	85	58.6	0	0	85	58.6
Lagan Valley	*	*	0	0	*	*
Mid Ulster	*	*	0	0	*	*
Newry And Armagh	30	37.5	0	0	30	37.5
North Antrim	47	48.0	0	0	47	48.0
North Down	*	*	0	0	*	*
South Antrim	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
South Down	5	33.3	0	0	5	33.3
Strangford	27	24.8	0	0	27	24.8
Upper Bann	*	*	0	0	*	*
West Tyrone	24	52.2	0	0	24	52.2
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	18	37.5	0	0	18	37.5
Total	#	#	#	#	410	43.2

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the maintained sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2008/09

	Catholic Maintained		Other Maintained		Total Maintained	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
Belfast North	#	#	*	*	14	33.3
Belfast South	8	44.4	0	0.0	8	44.4
Belfast West	#	#	*	*	48	41.7
East Antrim	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
East Derry	8	40.0	0	0.0	8	40.0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	12	40.0	0	0.0	12	40.0
Foyle	101	68.7	0	0.0	101	68.7

	Catholic Maintained		Other Maintained		Total Maintained	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Lagan Valley	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Mid Ulster	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
Newry And Armagh	22	37.3	0	0.0	22	37.3
North Antrim	41	40.2	0	0.0	41	40.2
North Down	9	40.9	0	0.0	9	40.9
South Antrim	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
South Down	8	29.6	0	0.0	8	29.6
Strangford	36	50.0	0	0.0	36	50.0
Upper Bann	*	*	0	0.0	*	*
West Tyrone	31	39.7	0	0.0	31	39.7
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	10	38.5	0	0.0	10	38.5
Total	#	#	*	*	360	45.0

Number and percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals as a proportion of all school leavers in the maintained sector with fewer than 5 GCSEs A*-G (inc. equivalents), by parliamentary constituency of pupil residence 2009/10

	Catholic Maintained		Other Maintained		Total Maintained	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Belfast East	*	*	*	*	*	*
Belfast North	#	#	*	*	29	63.0
Belfast South	7	46.7	0	0	7	46.7
Belfast West	#	#	*	*	53	41.7
East Antrim	*	*	0	0	*	*
East Derry	9	40.9	0	0	9	40.9
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	13	40.6	0	0	13	40.6
Foyle	60	65.2	0	0	60	65.2
Lagan Valley	*	*	0	0	*	*
Mid Ulster	21	45.7	0	0	21	45.7
Newry And Armagh	45	46.9	0	0	45	46.9
North Antrim	*	*	0	0	*	*
North Down	*	*	0	0	*	*
South Antrim	6	23.1	0	0	6	23.1
South Down	28	48.3	0	0	28	48.3
Strangford	*	*	0	0	*	*
Upper Bann	15	38.5	0	0	15	38.5
West Tyrone	23	32.9	0	0	23	32.9
Missing/Invalid Postcodes	8	47.1	0	0	8	47.1
Total	#	#	*	*	330	44.8

Source: School Leavers Survey

* Denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Figure greater or equal to 5 has been treated to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Child Psychologists

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education how many (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time child psychologists are currently employed by his Department.

(AQW 4586/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education is not the employing authority for Educational Psychologists. However, a total of 151 Educational Psychologists are currently employed by the 5 Education and Library Boards, ie (i) 84 full time and (ii) 67 part time.

Home-to-school Transport Policy

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the Home-To-School Transport Policy for pupils with learning difficulties; and (ii) whether these pupils lose transport provision once they reach 18 years old.

(AQW 4618/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The arrangements for transporting pupils with learning difficulties and who are in possession of a statement of special education needs are set out in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 of Departmental Circular 1996/41 (updated September 2009). The Circular is available on the Department of Education's website.

The arrangements indicate that where an Education and Library Board maintains a statement of special education needs of a pupil under Article 16 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, the decisions about that pupil's placement, including his or her entitlement to free home to school transport, will have been made by the Board. The general arrangements made for other pupils may not, therefore, apply in the case of a statemented pupil. The Circular also states that placements for such pupils, and any transport assistance provided, are subject to the efficient use of resources.

Pupils qualifying for this transport assistance do not lose it once they turn 18. The final year in which assistance with school transport is provided is that in which the pupil reaches the age of nineteen years. The year begins on 2nd July and ends on the succeeding 1st July.

Maintained Sector

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education whether the Catholic Church places any additional requirements on applicants seeking to work in the maintained sector in comparison with the current state requirements to work in the controlled sector.

(AQW 4629/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Catholic Church does not employ staff within maintained schools.

The Certificate in Religious Education is a mandatory requirement of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) for all those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position in a Catholic Maintained nursery or primary school here. CCMS have approved a number of providers, based upon the nature of the syllabi and content of the particular course, for student and qualified teachers to access Certificate in Religious Education, including St Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College, Iona Retreat Centre and a Life-light Home Study Course.

My Department is currently engaged in a review to assess the impact of the requirement of a religious certificate on current and future recruitment opportunities in the teaching sector, including any course accessibility issues. It is anticipated the review will be finalised in 2011 and its outcome will be shared with the Education Committee.

There are no additional requirements on those applying for non teaching posts in Catholic Maintained schools.

Education: Cross-border Co-operation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail the level, and to give some examples, of cross border co-operation within the education system.

(AQW 4665/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In recent years much excellent work has been carried out on an cross-border basis in the education sector.

Part 1 of a comprehensive study on North/South co-operation in the education sector has been agreed and finalised by the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Skills.

The two departments will commence Part 2 of the report and will identify areas with the potential for future practical co-operation.

I will arrange for a copy of Part 1 of the report to be placed in the Assembly Library.

South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of days the South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners have met in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4685/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board's standing orders require that the Commissioners should meet as a group on at least 6 occasions per year. The Board has advised that, since their appointment in July 2006, the Commissioners have held meetings as follows:

2006 – 6 meetings

2007 – 12 meetings

2008 – 10 meetings

2009 – 11 meetings

2010 – 10 meetings

2011 – 10 meetings up to October

These meetings generally extend over 2 days.

The numbers quoted above do not include other meetings which Commissioners attend individually in the course of exercising their responsibilities.

South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the current daily rate of pay of the South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners.

(AQW 4691/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners are paid at a daily rate of £500.

South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) travel costs; and (ii) accommodation expenses of the South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4693/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised me that the Commissioners' travel costs and accommodation expenses were as follows:

Financial Year	Travel	Accommodation
2006/07	£4,447	£ 850
2007/08	£8,195	£1,266
2008/09	£4,909	£1,258
2009/10	£5,994	£1,324
2010/11	£4,727	£ 280
2011/12	£2,251	£ 0

Education and Skills Authority

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the 'assets and liabilities' of (i) the Education and Library Boards; (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iii) the Staff Commission; and (iv) the Youth Council, which the Education and Skills Authority will 'subsume', according to the Statement on the 'Heads of Agreement' made by the First and deputy First Minister on 16 November 2011.

(AQW 4720/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The assets and liabilities of education organisations are set out in their respective resource accounts, copies of which are available from the Assembly Library.

In relation to the Education and Library Boards, Staff Commission, and Youth Council, my intention is that all of the assets and liabilities of those organisations will be transferred to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) on the appointed day, that is, the day on which the ESA is established.

Certain assets of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) were paid for by the Catholic Church. Those assets will be transferred by my Department to the Church prior to the appointed day. The remainder of the assets and liabilities of CCMS will be transferred to the ESA on the appointed day.

Sports Development and Promotion

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding his Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4737/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funding for sport would fall under the remit of the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure. My Department has not provided funding specifically for the development and promotion of rugby, soccer, gaelic games or motor sports in the last three years.

The Department has provided funding for the Curriculum Sports Programme which is delivered by the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletics Association. However, this programme does not focus on the skills associated with either soccer or gaelic games, but aims to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils. A total of £1.5m per year has been made available for this programme in 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Schools may of course use other funding from the Department that is delegated to them under the Local Management of Schools arrangements for such sports but the Department does not hold this level of detail.

Deprivation: Most Deprived Wards

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list the 10 percent most deprived wards; and what percentage of children in post-primary schools living in these wards attend a grammar school.

(AQW 4757/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage post-primary pupils resident in the 10 percent most deprived wards who attended grammar schools in 2010/11

Ward Name	% pupils attending grammar schools
Ardoyne	21.4
Ballee	13.9
Ballybot	29.9
Ballycolman	10.1
Ballymacarrett	8.4
Ballymote	19.6
Beechmount	21.3
Blackstaff	15.3
Brandywell	26.5
Callan Bridge	15.8
Carn Hill	34.7
Castledearg	37.8
Central (Coleraine)	37.2
Clonard	18.4
Coalisland South	38.3
Collin Glen	14.1
Coole	13.5
Coolessan	20.2
Court	18.8
Creggan Central	23.2
Creggan South	23.2
Cross Glebe	28.6
Crossmaglen	32.6
Crumlin (Belfast)	9.4
Daisy Hill	28.8
Devenish	24.0
Drumgask	4.9
Drumnamoe	23.5
Dunanney	7.8
Duncairn	14.8
East	14.1
Falls	11.0
Farranshane	22.8
Glen Road	34.7
Glencairn	13.6
Glencolin	22.4
Greystone (Limavady)	17.6
Legoniel	24.3
New Lodge	9.5
Northland	14.0
Old Warren	12.4
Rosemount	26.5
Shaftesbury	17.8

Ward Name	% pupils attending grammar schools
Shankill	6.2
Shantallow East	28.8
Shantallow West	36.6
Strand (Derry)	34.4
Sunnylands	24.1
The Diamond	30.1
The Mount	13.4
Twinbrook	15.8
Upper Springfield	18.4
Victoria (Derry)	35.0
Water Works	16.7
Westland	27.6
Whiterock	13.2
Woodstock	13.3
Woodvale	7.2

Source: NI school census

Note:

1 The deprivation ranking of wards is based on the Multiple Deprivation Measure rankings outlined in the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 report published in May 2010.

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Deprivation: Least Deprived Wards

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list the 10 percent least deprived of wards; and what percentage of children in post-primary schools living in these wards attend a grammar school.

(AQW 4758/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage post-primary pupils resident in the 10 percent least deprived wards who attended grammar schools in 2010/11

Ward Name	% pupils attending grammar schools
Ardeevin	57.4
Ballycrochan	64.5
Ballydown	49.3
Ballyhanwood	67.4
Ballyholme	84.5
Ballyloughan	65.3
Ballymacash	71.3
Ballymacconnell	61.4
Ballynure	57.8
Ballyrobert	44.8
Bluefield	55.8
Boneybefore	44.8
Broadway	71.7
Bryansburn	66.1
Burleigh Hill	51.3
Cairnshill	70.4
Carncastle	42.6
Carryduff West	77.9
Cherryvalley	70.9
Collinbridge	60.2

Ward Name	% pupils attending grammar schools
Comber West	67.4
Craigavad	88.6
Crawfordsburn	86.9
Cultra	88.6
Doagh	52.3
Drumbo	81.5
Dundonald	56.0
Finaghy	76.1
Galgorm	71.2
Galwally	76.7
Gilnahirk	82.5
Hillfoot	77.0
Hillsborough	77.4
Hollywood Priory	83.2
Jordanstown	71.2
Knockagh	76.4
Knockbracken	76.5
Knocklynn	70.4
Lisbane	74.7
Lisnagarvy	55.1
Magheralave	64.0
Magheralin	52.8
Mallusk	54.3
Malone	96.3
Moira	67.0
Moneyreagh	75.3
Movilla	56.2
Princetown	86.1
Saintfield	70.2
Spring Hill	53.0
Stormont	86.9
Strand (Coleraine)	79.4
Stranmillis	95.6
Templepatrick	84.8
Wallace Park	73.1
Waringstown	50.1
Waterside	79.3
Whitespots	59.6

Source: NI school census

Note:

2 The deprivation ranking of wards is based on the Multiple Deprivation Measure rankings outlined in the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 report published in May 2010.

Ballymoney: Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils living in each ward in Ballymoney attends a grammar school. (AQW 4759/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of post-primary school pupils resident in Ballymoney District Council area who attended grammar schools in 2010/11

Ward Name	% pupils attending grammar school
Ballyhoe And Corkey	26.4
Benvardin	41.3
Carnany	48.5
Clogh Mills	48.5
Dervock	59.6
Dunloy	53.1
Fairhill	39.7
Glebe (Ballymoney)	56.6
Killoquin Lower	41.8
Killoquin Upper	33.1
Knockaholet	39.1
Newhill	30.3
Route	62.1
Seacon	47.8
Stranocum	32.3
The Vow	48.4

Source: NI school census

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education (i) why, as part of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, sectoral support bodies will be created for the controlled and maintained sectors, but will not be created for the integrated sector; and (ii) what are the proposed roles and functions of a Trustee Support Body for (a) Catholic schools; and (b) the controlled sector. **(AQW 4761/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) will continue to be the representative body for the integrated sector. The roles of all sectoral bodies will be determined following examination of business cases by my Department.

Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed education campus at the Lisanelly site in Omagh. **(AQO 800/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: Can I say from the outset that I believe the Lisanelly Campus provides the people of Omagh with a unique opportunity to lead the way in developing a new shared state-of-the-art campus capable of servicing the needs of all its young people for generations to come.

The Executive also see the potential of this project and for that reason it has been included as a priority in the Draft Programme for Government.

In April this year the Lisanelly site transferred into the ownership of the Department of Education which represents a significant step towards this project becoming a reality.

A Master Plan has been produced and approved by my Department and exemplar designs are nearing completion.

This has helped to bring the project to life for the pupils, parents, teachers and the wider community. It provides a better understanding of what a shared education campus might look like. What could be achieved and the facilities that could be provided to meet the needs of all young people in Omagh and surrounding areas.

These designs have been the subject of extensive public consultation and feedback from the community has been very positive, particularly from the young people.

This project, like every other potential project, must be considered within the context of the needs of the area identified through the area plan.

While the current financial climate is challenging I am committed to progressing with the full exploration of the potential of a shared education campus at Omagh.

Schools: Viability Audit

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what steps have been taken to ensure that the viability audit of schools is rural proofed.

(AQO 798/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The viability audit includes all primary and post-primary schools and focuses on enrolments, quality of education and financial stability. The purpose is to identify those schools facing significant challenges in remaining educationally viable, to identify the root causes of the problems, and to present proposals to protect the education of their pupils.

The Sustainable Schools Policy is the Department's framework for assessing the viability and long term sustainability of schools. The policy addresses the issue of rural schools and it was rural-proofed before publication in 2009. The viability audit draws on the relevant criteria and indicators set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy.

The viability audit is only the first step in the move to the more strategic, area based approach to planning the schools estate. It is necessary in order to develop the effective, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools we need to provide the broad and balanced curriculum that pupils need and deserve.

Schools: Vocational Education

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to ensure that the post primary schools which are best placed to offer pupils vocational education, are maintained in regional towns.

(AQO 799/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My focus is to provide all our pupils with access to the highest quality education possible rather than focusing on individual institutions.

The Area Planning process I have commissioned will result in an effectively planned, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools here. This will ensure that we have the right type and size of schools, in the right places, to meet the needs of our pupils and young people.

In addition, my Department's Entitlement Framework guarantees equality of access for all young people to a broad, balanced and more economically relevant curriculum. They will have access to at least 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and 27 courses post-16. Regardless of the school which a young person attends or where they live.

Special Schools: Viability Audit

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education why Special Needs Schools have not been included in the schools audit.

(AQO 801/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The schools viability audit key criteria are enrolments, standards and financial viability as outlined in the Sustainable Schools Policy.

Special Needs Schools are not covered by the Sustainable Schools Policy. However, Special Needs Schools will be included as part of the long-term Area Planning Process.

Teachers: Redundancies

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have been made redundant since June 2010.

(AQO 802/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: 568 teachers have been made redundant since June 2010. Over 95% of these were voluntary redundancies.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Ms Lewis asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the measures taken by his Department to maximise the employment opportunities for newly qualified teachers.

(AQO 803/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has repeatedly urged employers to give preference to newly qualified teachers (NQTs) when filling vacancies, including those of a temporary nature.

From September 2010 my Department has monitored the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers on a monthly basis. Schools and employing authorities are routinely challenged when such employment occurs, and an explanation sought as to why such teachers are being re-employed in preference to NQTs or other non-retired teachers. From September 2011 my Department has introduced a flat rate of pay, based on the salary levels applicable to NQTs, for prematurely retired teachers who return to teaching, and made complementary amendments to the Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools (LMS), which will encourage schools to give preference to newly or recently qualified teachers.

It is too early at present to make an assessment of the impact of these measures. However, my Department will assess the effectiveness of these measures at the end of the current academic year and annually thereafter.

Education and Library Boards: Ministerial Meetings

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education how many meetings he has had with the Chief Executives of each of the Education and Library Boards since taking up office.

(AQO 804/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since taking up office, I have met with each of the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards once.

Each Chief Executive is designated as the Board's Accounting Officer and is personally accountable to the Department's Accounting Officer (the Permanent Secretary) for safeguarding the public funds for which he/she has charge; for ensuring propriety and regularity in the handling of those public funds; and for the day to day operation of the Board.

The Permanent Secretary meets Chief Executives of the Boards on a regular basis.

I have also met with the Chairpersons of each of the Boards. They are accountable to me as Minister, their key role being to provide leadership and good governance, and to ensure that Boards deliver the policies set by me.

Schools: Budget

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to re-profile the education budget, especially in relation to the Aggregated Schools Budget.

(AQO 805/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following decisions on Budget 2010, which present major challenges for education over the period to 2014-15, my predecessor formulated a Savings Delivery Plan to realise the significant savings required. The intention was to protect front-line services as much as possible. Because of the scale of the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) it was impossible to protect it totally and the Savings Delivery Plan predicated savings of £27m / £85m / £114m / £180m. I have been conscious of the challenge this will pose for Boards of Governors under the Local Management of Schools framework. I have looked again at the ASB and have reallocated £10m / £15m / £15m into the schools budget over the next three years. I am however not relenting on exploring the scope for further savings and have asked officials to carry out a review right across the education budget with the primary focus being to deliver additional funding for the classroom to benefit our children and young people. I will continue to argue the case for further investment in the future to help alleviate pressures on the education budget.

Preschool Provision

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education how many children benefit from free pre-school provision.

(AQO 806/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At the time of the 2010 Schools Census there were 22,504 children in funded pre-school places available across the north of Ireland; 14,408 in statutory nursery schools and units attached to primary schools; and 7599 in settings in the voluntary/private sector; and 497 in Reception classes in primary schools.

These numbers have increased in 2011/12 to over 23,000 children, and will be detailed in the 2011 Schools Census which took place on 7 October 2011 and which will be published in February 2012.

Institutional Child Abuse

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what role his Department will play in the forthcoming inquiry into institutional child abuse.

(AQO 807/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the decision by the Executive to proceed with an inquiry into historical institutional abuse as soon as possible.

The Department of Education was actively involved at senior level on the interdepartmental Taskforce, which was set up to consider the nature of the inquiry and bring forward recommendations to the Executive. My Department will work closely with other departments to move forward with establishing the inquiry and will assist and co-operate with the inquiry, when established, in any way it can.

I understand preparations are underway through the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and my Department will respond positively to any request for assistance in supporting the work of the inquiry.

Department for Employment and Learning

Regional Colleges: Religious Balance of Students

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the current religious balance of students in each of the six Regional Colleges.

(AQW 4023/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Professional and Technical enrolments by religious background in the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges for the 2009/10 academic year are detailed in the Annex attached.

FE College	Catholic	Protestant	Other/No Religion	Total Known	Not Stated/Not Known
Belfast Metropolitan	13,198 (47%)	11,622 (41%)	3,547 (13%)	28,367 (100%)	14,200
Northern Regional	5,732 (31%)	10,992 (60%)	1,482 (8%)	18,206 (100%)	3,448
South Eastern	5,301 (28%)	11,137 (60%)	2,216 (12%)	18,654 (100%)	7,390
Southern Regional	14,702 (58%)	8,771 (35%)	1,696 (7%)	25,169 (100%)	7,670
South West	9,231 (69%)	3,594 (27%)	624 (5%)	13,449 (100%)	6,556
North West	12,564 (76%)	3,572 (22%)	350 (2%)	16,486 (100%)	3,755
Total	60,728 (50%)	49,688 (41%)	9,915 (8%)	120,331 (100%)	43,019

Source: Further Educational Statistical Record

Notes:

- 1 The percentages stated in brackets relate to row proportions i.e. make-up within each college and exclude those enrolments where it is not stated or not known. They may not add to 100% due to rounding.
- 2 It should be noted that a sizeable proportion of those enrolling with FE colleges in Northern Ireland do not disclose their community background.
- 3 The latest available full-year data are for the 2009/10 academic year.

Step Ahead Employment Initiative

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact of the Step Ahead employment initiative being halted.

(AQW 4051/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is regrettable that it has been necessary to introduce a pause on recruitment to the Step Ahead strand of the Steps to Work (StW) programme. When the then Minister, Sir Reg Empey, initially introduced Step Ahead in September 2009 it was announced that it was a temporary initiative for a two year period. In view of the ongoing economic situation I would have wished to have been in a position to continue with the Step Ahead initiative but regrettably the funding was not available to enable me to do so.

The pause in recruitment will delay access to Step Ahead opportunities both for jobseekers and voluntary and community sector organisations offering temporary employment. Any adverse impact of the pause in recruitment will be mitigated by the fact that those jobseekers who can no longer avail of Step Ahead will be eligible for support through the full range of provision on the Steps to Work programme. This includes work experience placements, training opportunities, help with the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, assistance for those seeking to enter self-employment and mentoring.

Similarly, participating organisations within the voluntary and community sector will be able to offer work experience opportunities, within the Steps to Work programme, to anyone interested in gaining work experience within their sector.

Should additional resources become available later this year I would intend to restart recruitment to Step Ahead, though this may be on a more selective and targeted basis.

I would also wish to advise you that my Department is seeking funds from other sources for a variant of Step Ahead which would aim to assist young unemployed, those affected by the re-assessment of Incapacity Benefit and lone parents affected by changes in benefit regulations.

Ilex Urban Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, with regard to Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4138/11-15)

Dr Farry: The following European Social Fund project is receiving funding under the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme:

Project Name	Start & Finish date	ESF	DEL	Other Match	Total
Triax Derry 2020	1/4/11 – 1/3/14	£990,587	£619,118	£866,763	£2,476,468

Stranmillis University College's Annual Income

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of Stranmillis University College's annual income comes from his Department; and what percentage comes from earned sources.

(AQW 4225/11-15)

Dr Farry: Stranmillis University College has informed me that based on its last published financial statements (2010), 54% of non-capital annual income was provided by the Department and 19% related to earned sources.

St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast: Learning and Teaching Areas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much was spent on enhancing or refurbishing the learning and teaching areas at (i) St Mary's University College; and (ii) Stranmillis University College, Belfast, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4320/11-15)

Dr Farry: The university colleges have informed me that the amount spent in the last three academic years on enhancing or refurbishing their learning and teaching areas is as shown in the table below;

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
St Mary's University College	£58,557	£501,555	£523,494	£1,083,606
Stranmillis University College	£382,297	£969,694	£599,161	£1,951,152

Students Studying Psychology

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students (i) are currently studying Psychology at university; and (ii) have graduated from a Psychology course in each of the last five years, broken by down (a) university; and (b) constituency where the student resides.

(AQW 4341/11-15)

Dr Farry: The numbers of Psychology students that enrolled and qualified from Northern Ireland (NI) Higher Education Institutions in each of the last five years, broken down by Higher Education Institution and Parliamentary Constituency Area are provided in the attached tables at the annexes.

Annex 1 Enrolments on Psychology courses at NI Higher Education Institutions from 2005/06 to 2009/10 broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area and Higher Education Institution

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2005/06			2006/07			2007/08			2008/09			2009/10		
	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total
Belfast East	35	10	50	30	10	40	20	10	30	25	5	30	30	10	35
Belfast North	30	30	60	25	25	45	20	20	40	20	15	35	15	10	25
Belfast South	115	25	135	75	15	90	35	15	50	40	10	55	55	15	70
Belfast West	50	30	75	40	30	70	25	25	50	25	20	50	30	25	55
East Antrim	30	30	60	30	25	55	20	25	45	15	20	35	15	25	45
East Londonderry	15	100	115	15	95	115	10	90	100	10	85	95	15	105	120
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	30	30	65	35	25	60	25	25	50	25	20	45	20	25	50
Foyle	25	160	180	25	150	175	25	130	160	30	120	145	35	130	165
Lagan Valley	50	25	80	45	35	80	55	40	95	60	40	100	50	50	95
Mid Ulster	30	40	70	30	40	65	35	45	75	30	35	65	35	50	85
Newry and Armagh	40	45	85	45	40	90	45	35	75	35	35	70	30	35	65

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2005/06			2006/07			2007/08			2008/09			2009/10		
	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total
North Antrim	20	70	90	20	75	95	20	75	95	15	70	85	20	70	90
North Down	45	20	60	35	20	55	30	20	50	35	15	50	25	15	40
South Antrim	40	45	80	45	35	80	40	35	70	45	25	70	35	25	60
South Down	35	25	60	30	25	55	35	25	55	35	20	55	35	20	50
Strangford	50	20	70	35	20	55	30	20	50	35	15	50	40	15	60
Upper Bann	35	35	70	40	25	65	35	35	70	35	35	70	40	30	70
West Tyrone	25	50	75	35	60	95	25	60	85	20	55	75	20	60	80
Ni Domiciled Enrolments With Unknown Postcodes	0	0	0	25	0	25	5	10	15	5	25	25	0	20	20
Non Ni Domiciled Enrolments	75	155	230	70	140	205	70	135	205	55	115	175	60	115	175
Total	780	940	1,720	730	885	1,615	610	860	1,470	590	790	1,380	610	850	1,460

Annex 2 Qualifiers from Psychology courses at NI Higher Education Institutions from 2005/06 to 2009/10 broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area and Higher Education Institution

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2005/06			2006/07			2007/08			2008/09			2009/10		
	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total
Belfast East	5	0	5	5	0	10	5	5	10	5	5	5	10	0	10
Belfast North	0	10	10	5	5	10	10	5	10	5	5	15	0	0	5
Belfast South	15	5	20	15	5	20	10	5	15	10	0	10	15	5	15
Belfast West	10	5	20	10	5	15	10	10	20	5	5	15	5	10	15
East Antrim	5	5	10	10	5	15	10	15	25	5	5	10	5	5	5
East Londonderry	5	15	20	5	20	20	10	25	30	5	25	30	0	25	25
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5	5	15	10	5	15	5	5	15	10	5	15	5	5	10
Foyle	5	30	35	5	40	45	5	30	35	10	35	40	10	35	45
Lagan Valley	10	5	15	10	5	15	15	10	25	10	5	15	20	15	35
Mid Ulster	5	10	15	10	10	15	10	10	20	5	10	10	15	15	25
Newry and Armagh	5	10	15	10	15	25	10	10	20	10	10	20	15	10	20
North Antrim	5	20	25	5	10	15	10	20	30	5	30	30	5	15	20
North Down	5	5	10	10	5	15	10	5	15	10	5	15	10	5	15
South Antrim	5	10	15	10	5	15	10	10	20	20	10	30	10	10	20
South Down	10	10	15	10	5	15	5	5	10	15	10	25	10	5	15
Strangford	10	0	10	10	5	15	10	10	20	5	0	5	10	5	15
Upper Bann	10	15	25	10	5	15	10	5	15	10	10	20	10	10	20
West Tyrone	5	5	10	10	10	20	10	20	30	10	10	20	5	20	20

	2005/06			2006/07			2007/08			2008/09			2009/10		
Parliamentary Constituency Area	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Total
Ni Domiciled Qualifiers With Unknown Postcodes	0	0	0	0	10	10	0	5	5	0	5	5	0	0	5
Non Ni Domiciled Qualifiers	10	45	60	25	30	55	30	55	80	15	45	65	20	40	60
Total	130	215	345	175	200	375	195	260	455	170	230	400	175	225	405

Sources: Higher Education Statistics Agency and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (for Parliamentary Constituency analysis).

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2009/10.
- (3) Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and therefore may not sum to totals. Religious Background of Students

Universities: Religious Breakdown

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide a breakdown of the religious background of students at university in the last term of the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQW 4432/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information by term is not available from the Higher Education datasets that are held by the Department and the latest year available relates to the 2009/10 academic year.

The religious background of Northern Ireland domiciled students at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 2009/10 is detailed in the table overleaf. These figures exclude the religious background of students from Northern Ireland who attend University in Great Britain as this information is not collected by those institutions.

Religious Background	Enrolments	% of known enrolments
Protestant	14,415	38%
Catholic	20,995	56%
Other	2,270	6%
Total Known	37,680	100%
Not Known	5,990	

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- (4) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (5) Information on religion is only collected for NI domiciled students studying at NI HEIs and therefore the above tables do not include students from outside NI.
- (6) It should be noted that it is not mandatory to disclose religious background when enrolling with HEIs in Northern Ireland and therefore religious affiliation can have a high non-response rate.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how much funding his Department has received from the European Social Fund Programme since 2007; (ii) how much of this funding was spent on (a) Higher Education Institutions; (b) Further Education Colleges; and (c) Essential Skills Schemes; (iii) how much funding his Department is due to receive under the Programme by 2013; and (iv) where his Department will allocate this funding.

(AQW 4451/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Northern Ireland European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2007-2013 was allocated €165,770,300 of ESF assistance by the European Commission, of which €45,742,494, equating to £38,527,938, has been received to date. The amount of ESF support offered to project applicants includes: £195,794 offered to a University, and £2,194,477 offered to Colleges of Further Education. No funding was directly offered to applicants specifically for Essential Skills Schemes. The Department is due to receive a further €120,027,806 of ESF assistance under the programme, which will be allocated among 82 projects selected for support under Priority 1 of the Programme, government programmes such as ApprenticeshipsNI which is currently supported under Priority 2, and also to minor technical activities undertaken by the Department and funded under Priority 3 .

Potential Public Liability Insurance Claims

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he would consider assuming responsibility for the payment of potential public liability insurance claims by participants of his Department's apprentice and back to work programmes, in order to encourage greater uptake of programmes by employers.

(AQW 4456/11-15)

Dr Farry: Responsibility for the payment of potential Public Liability Insurance claims by participants on ApprenticeshipsNI lies with his or her employer in line with the employer's obligations to all employees. An apprentice is employed from day one and is subject to the employer's and/or training supplier's public liability insurance when availing of directed training.

The ApprenticeshipsNI package on offer remains very attractive to employers. The cost of off-the-job training is fully funded by my Department and an employer incentive payment is available depending on the occupational area and on completion of the apprenticeship.

There is currently a record number of 12,647 apprentices on the programme which is a substantial and encouraging achievement in these challenging economic times.

Training Suppliers delivering the Department's Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme must ensure that each participant is fully insured during their period in training. Training Suppliers have a contractual obligation to ensure that each participant is fully covered by Public Liability Insurance at all times.

Steps to Work (StW) is the main adult return to work provision . Participants must be fully insured at all times during their participation on StW. When a participant is on placement or directed training, the Lead Contractor must ensure that full Public and Employer's liability insurance is in place either through their own insurance, or the sub-contractor or placement provider's insurance.

Vocational Postgraduate Courses

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what funding his Department offers for vocational postgraduate courses, such as the bar and solicitors' courses, at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies, Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 4575/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not provide funding for vocational postgraduate courses at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies at Queen's University Belfast.

Departmental funding for Northern Ireland domiciled students pursuing postgraduate diplomas and certificates, including those for legal practice, in the United Kingdom has not been available since September 2005.

At that time, my Department reviewed its priorities in light of the Government's 2002 Science, Engineering and Technology Strategy "Investing in Innovation" and decided that its limited postgraduate support budget should be targeted at funding Masters and PhD courses at the higher levels recommended in that report.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast: Chair of the Governing Body

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the recent interview given by the Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College, Belfast, including the accuracy of his remarks, the public reaction to the interview, and the impact on staff, students and the general public.

(AQW 4844/11-15)

Dr Farry: Any statements or interviews given by the Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College are a matter for the Governing Body. I found the comments interesting and am not in a position to comment on any reaction to the interview nor would I wish to do so.

Step Ahead Initiative

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when his Department will resume recruitment to the Steps to Work employment initiative, Step Ahead.

(AQO 819/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is regrettable that it has proved necessary to implement a pause on recruitment to the Step Ahead strand of the Steps to Work programme. Should additional resources become available I would be able to resume recruitment to Step Ahead later this financial year, though this may be on a more selective and targeted basis. Alternatively, the Department will consider its re-introduction at the beginning of next year.

I am also awaiting the outcome of a bid to the Social Protection Fund which would enable me to introduce a variant of Step Ahead targeted at assisting young unemployed, lone parents and those affected by the Incapacity Benefit re-assessment process.

Information and Communication Technology

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to address the skills shortage in the Information and Communication Technology sector.

(AQO 816/11-15)

Dr Farry: Senior executives from the Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) sector and their representative bodies have advised me that they currently have hard to fill vacancies in their companies. I am currently establishing an ICT Working Group made up of key stakeholders to identify the specific skills issues and to find a way forward to address them.

My Department has much experience in dealing with skills shortages in the ICT industry. In 2007 we established a Future Skills Action Group, this led to an increase in the number of applicants to computer engineering courses at the two universities and colleges through an extensive media campaign and school based activities; an increase in the number of people available to work in the sector through the provision of a conversion course for non-ICT graduates; an improvement in the compatibility of the courses offered by universities with the needs of industry and completion of new research into the future skills needs of the ICT sector in Northern Ireland.

Further Education Colleges

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps are being taken to enhance the role of further education colleges in providing training and employment opportunities.

(AQO 814/11-15)

Dr Farry: The development of FE Means Business and the establishment of six large regional colleges has positioned them at the heart of workforce and economic development. Each college has increasing involvement with employers and businesses. Colleges are the first choice training provider for the Department's Skills Solutions service. This has led to an increased role for them in the delivery of industry-relevant training. In addition, the capacity building element of the Department's Assured Skills programme along with the lecturers into industry initiative has supported the up-skilling of college lecturers in priority areas for economic development, including: information and communications technology, financial services and renewables.

While training cannot directly create jobs, indirectly the role of my Department through its further education colleges in providing training and employment opportunities supports the competitiveness and growth of the economy and business.

Graduate Employment

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the current and future employment opportunities for local graduates.

(AQO 815/11-15)

Dr Farry: The recession and difficulties in the labour market have made it more difficult for many people – graduates and non-graduates alike – to find and keep a job. This is true in Northern Ireland, for the UK as a whole, and for the Republic of Ireland.

The latest data shows that seventy-three percent (73%) of full-time students from Northern Ireland who graduated in 09-10 were in work six months after graduation. This compares to 71% for the UK as a whole.

Future prospects will be linked to the performance of the labour market, particularly at the local level. I trust that the initiatives outlined last week in the draft Programme for Government and in the draft Economic Strategy and supported by all parties in the Executive will enhance people's job prospects, not least those of graduates. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that many commentators remain apprehensive about prospects for the local, national and European economies.

Consequently, my Department will continue to actively support graduates to find employment. For example, more than 700 graduates have participated in the Department's Entry to Management Programme (INTRO) and 89% of those completing the programme went on to attain full time employment.

In addition, 193 graduates have gained relevant work experience on the Graduate Acceleration Programme since it was introduced last year.

Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Merger

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQO 817/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the member will be aware, as the merger was endorsed by the previous Minister, a public consultation was carried out on the proposed merger earlier this year and the responses received were discussed with the Committee for Employment and Learning. Several key stakeholder groups subsequently requested meetings with me to discuss the proposal. . I have met with the Transferor Representatives' Council, members of the governing body and senior staff from Stranmillis, members of management from Queen's University, members of the governing body and senior staff of St. Mary's University College, and

elected representatives from a number of political parties. These meetings have been useful in helping me consider the next steps to be taken in this process.

I will be in a position to make an announcement on the way forward on the proposal by the end of this month.

St Mary's University College, Belfast: Liberal Arts Degree

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Liberal Arts degree course provided by St Mary's University College, Belfast.

(AQO 820/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has a duty to ensure that the higher education teaching provision that it funds in Northern Ireland's universities and university colleges is of good quality and meets agreed standards. My Department discharges this duty by contracting the Quality Assurance Agency to devise and implement quality assurance methods.

St. Mary's, as a University College of Queen's University, was last subjected to an Institutional Audit by the Quality Assurance Agency during 2009. The judgements made were:

- Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.
- Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

On this basis, I am content that the Liberal Arts Degree Course at St. Mary's meets the required academic standards. The provision of Liberal Arts at St. Mary's is, however, in addition to the main business of the College, which is as a provider of teacher education.

Universities: Student Numbers

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following his decision on student tuition fees, for an update on his discussions with the university sector about increasing student numbers.

(AQO 821/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the member will be aware, the Executive has made available a total of £3m for additional higher education places by 2014/15. From this my Department has to meet the institutional grant to the higher education institutions and cover the costs of servicing student support costs. The recently published Programme for Government sets out that my Department will provide an additional 540 student places by 2015 and all of these places will be in the important areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. My officials are working with the higher education providers, including those in further education, on the detail of how the additional places will be allocated.

South Eastern Regional College: Capital Investment

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what capital investment projects for the South Eastern Regional College will be supported in the next three years.

(AQO 822/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no capital investment specifically earmarked for the South Eastern Regional College in the next three years. The South Eastern Regional College has however, had recent investment, valued at £50m, across its campuses in Lisburn, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Ballynahinch and Newtownards. The South Eastern Regional College now has one of the best estates in the UK. A Performing Arts Centre project which had been earmarked for funding was put on hold at January 2010, due to a shortfall of capital funding in the 10/11 year.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Assembly Questions: Cost

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the average cost to her Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3444/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

Go for It Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she expects the legal challenge from Enterprise NI against InvestNI's tendering process for the Go For It programme to be resolved; and when the contract will be awarded to a provider.

(AQW 4041/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is expected that the challenge will be heard by the High Court in February 2012, with judgement being given several weeks later. There is however the possibility that the court date might move or that the decision would be subject to an appeal. The award date for the contract for the Business Start Programme cannot therefore be known with certainty.

Go for It Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with regard to the current legal challenge by Enterprise NI against InvestNI's tendering process for the Go For It programme and the interim measures put in place by InvestNI, to detail whether the interim service provided by InvestNI will be subject to independent monitoring; and if so, what the independent audit procedure will entail.

(AQW 4042/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The interim service that Invest NI has put in place is to utilise existing Invest NI staff that would, as part of their normal duties, already be providing business advice and guidance to businesses and those wishing to start a business.

Invest NI is not delivering a Business Start Programme nor engaging a delivery agent. Invest NI is prevented from delivering a fully functional programme, unless Enterprise Northern Ireland withdraw their legal action, or until the legal process runs its course.

Therefore independent monitoring and an independent audit procedure are not required nor are they appropriate in this instance.

Of course, the activities carried out by Invest NI staff are subject to the normal audit and review requirements of a non departmental public body.

Go for It Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with regard to the current legal challenge by Enterprise NI against InvestNI's tendering process for the Go For It programme, to detail the interim measures put in place by InvestNI in the Derry City Council area in terms of (i) the resources allocated; (ii) the experience of delivery staff; and (iii) the service provided.

(AQW 4043/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) In the Derry City Council area, Invest NI has 3 existing staff that would, as part of their normal duties, already be providing business advice and guidance to businesses. This includes advice to those wishing to start their own business. In addition, and as part of our ongoing work on the Jobs Fund, 1 further staff member will work on outreach/development activities in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and for individuals Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs).
- (ii) The individual staff involved have many years of experience in providing advice and support to those individuals requiring business support.
The interim service provides 1:
- (iii) 1 advice, business clinics and business plan support, delivered at Invest NI North West Office at Timberquay, and at other local locations subject to demand. Invest NI continue to advertise to stimulate the public interest in starting a business and will respond directly to all enquiries generated.

New Airline Routes to Northern Ireland

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department is seeking to attract new airline routes to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 4126/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is seeking to maximise the opportunities presented by the recent reduction in the rate of Air Passenger Duty applied to Northern Ireland for direct long haul flights operating in band B. This has sent a positive message to airlines that Northern Ireland is a viable option for long haul business.

In addition, I have asked Tourism Ireland to seek to identify potential new carriers and routes, both long haul and short haul, into Northern Ireland which may be eligible for co-operative marketing assistance. For example, Tourism Ireland is working closely with bmibaby to promote its new Belfast/Amsterdam route and has launched a co-operative campaign to drive demand for the new service in the Netherlands.

Tourism Ireland also plans to hold an Access Workshop in the near future involving all Northern Ireland airports and air (and sea) carriers.

London 2012 Olympics

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether companies in Northern Ireland have benefited from the London 2012 Olympics; and to what extent.

(AQW 4133/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Companies in Northern Ireland have benefited both directly and indirectly from the London 2012 Olympics. Invest Northern Ireland is aware of around 40 local businesses that have:

- Won direct contracts with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) and the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA)
- Won supply chain contracts
- Won business through CompeteFor (the official 2012 business brokerage website) which they might not have been aware of otherwise

The value of these contracts is estimated to exceed £40m. A precise value is difficult to establish given the strict publicity restrictions imposed by the ODA and LOCOG on disclosing information about contracts won. With over £200m worth of contracts still to be procured by The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) there are still opportunities for Northern Ireland based companies to benefit further. In addition, significant opportunities also exist through other 2012 related commissioning bodies and various supply chains.

As well as direct business won, Invest NI has undertaken considerable capability development work with many companies in Northern Ireland. To date, more than 200 companies have received specific advice to assist with areas such as quality management, tender preparation, etc. This will assist them to present robust tender submissions for future projects, which increasingly require a professional approach to tendering.

London Olympics 2012

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance her Department has given to companies and businesses to help them to benefit from the London Olympics 2012.

(AQW 4134/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI, as Northern Ireland's business development agency, has responsibility for helping local companies in their efforts to win Olympics contracts. Invest NI has been promoting and raising awareness of 2012 business opportunities and assisting companies to become better prepared and fit to win contracts by increasing skills, competitiveness, capacity and capability.

Invest NI continues to offer support to companies by:

- Promoting the official CompeteFor business brokerage website
- Organising events to promote business opportunities and business skills development
- Distributing opportunity bulletins issued by The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Ltd (LOCOG) directly to relevant companies, business representative organisations and local councils.
- Advising companies on how to strengthen their representations to buyers in key areas such as professional tendering, quality management, health and safety, equal opportunities, website design.
- Facilitating meetings with key buyers in London and Belfast
- Providing one-to-one consultancy support with bid preparation to selected companies
- Negotiating preferential rates for managed offices in London for clients.
- Working with LOCOG on the remaining opportunities.

Invest NI's most recent 2012 business support initiatives focus on developing Northern Ireland based companies' tendering skills with the production of a comprehensive guide to professional tendering and on supporting companies' efforts to develop links with major contractors in London.

Spectrum Auction

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations she has made to Ofcom or the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in relation to the potential use of revenue received from the forthcoming spectrum auction under the 4G licence award.

(AQW 4144/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Representations were made in responding to the consultation document published by OFCOM earlier this year. Details of my Department's response are available on OFCOM's website in which it was suggested that funds should be used to improve mobile coverage especially in rural areas or commercially unattractive areas. Use of proceeds from the auction is not a matter for Ofcom but rather it is a matter for the UK Government. Revenue received from the auction will be paid to Her Majesty's Treasury. Currently there is no indication that funds raised by the auction will be used directly to improve mobile coverage in any part of the UK, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer did announce that £150 million had been earmarked to improve mobile coverage especially in rural areas. DETI is already in discussions with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on how this fund should be used in Northern Ireland.

NI Screen Money

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 3048/11-15, (i) what strategy is in place to influence where NI Screen money is spent; (ii) whether InvestNI has sought to prioritise geographical areas where NI Screen spend money on productions; and (iii) for a breakdown of what the money awarded to (a) Foyle; and (b) London was spent on.

(AQW 4151/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Screen Commission's current strategy 'Driving Global Growth' 2010 – 2014 is designed to grow and develop Northern Ireland as a production centre for film, television and digital content. It is a progression of its last strategy 'Building on Success' which attracted some of the world's largest production companies including HBO and Universal. KPMG and Oxford Economics during their appraisal of this strategy, described the NI Screen Fund as having performed excellently, with strong additionality and having exceeded its headline targets.

NI Screen's current strategy 'Driving Global Growth' which builds on the achievements of the previous strategy is focused on continuing the growth of the positive productivity impact of the screen industry in Northern Ireland so as to optimize the impact on the local economy and ensure value for money, through a balanced portfolio of investment and the development of the local skills base. Invest NI does not seek to prioritise geographical areas within Northern Ireland where NI Screen funding is utilised; this is largely dependent on the location of the production company and funded project.

My Department through Invest NI has allocated funding of £6.3m for the current year 2011 – 2012 for development of the screen industries. The following table illustrates Invest NI funding allocated by NI Screen to production companies in the Foyle constituency and to those based in London. It should be noted that in relation to those respective companies based in London we will only offer support for production activity that occurs in Northern Ireland and provides economic benefit in Northern Ireland. The level of production taking place on Northern Ireland will be negotiated by NI Screen; however, it will be negotiated on the basis that the return to the NI economy will not be less than 3.5:1 as an agreed target minimum for any individual project.

List of productions funded	Company	Constituency/Location of production Company	Amount Awarded
Archeology Portal	360 Production	Foyle	25,000
Digging for Britain	360 Production	Foyle	100,000
Dig World War 2	360 Production	Foyle	70,000
Dog Fighter	Dark Water Studios	Foyle	105,384
Things You Need to Know	360 Production	Foyle	200,000
Titanic and Me	360 Production	Foyle	80,000
Cherrybomb	Generator Entertainment	London	282,951
City of Ember	Pipeworks Productions Ltd	London	765,307
Coming Up	Touchpaper Productions	London	50,000
Five Minutes Of Heaven Aka Reconciliation	Reconciliation Ltd	London	250,000
Freak Dog AKA Red Mist	Generator 1 Ltd	London	247,737
Game of Thrones (GoT)	Fire & Blood Ltd	London	1,600,000
Ghost Machine	Generator 1 Ltd	London	247,737
GoT Series 1	Fire & Blood Ltd	London	1,600,000
GoT Series 2	Fire & Blood Ltd	London	2,850,000
Grabbers	Erin Island L Ltd	London	59,000
Hunger	Blast Films Ltd	London	300,000
Killing Bono	Cinema Three SPV3	London	400,000
Man on the Run	Running Man Ltd	London	500,000
Messiah	Great Meadow Messiah V	London	300,000
Mo	ITV Studios Ltd	London	250,000
Occupation	Kudos (Occupation) Ltd	London	500,000
Small Island	Television Ruby (Small Island) Ltd	London	600,000

Ballymena Business Centre

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many (i) initial business advice sessions; (ii) training sessions and (iii) business plans have been completed in the Ballymena area since the Ballymena Business Centre transferred to InvestNI on 1 October 2011.

(AQW 4183/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The award of contract for Invest NI's Business Start Programme, which was due to commence on Oct 1st 2011, has been delayed as a result of a legal challenge by Enterprise NI. Since 1st October 2011, Invest NI Regional Offices dealt with over 600 new enquiries from individuals wishing to establish their own business. The North Eastern Regional Office received over 75 new enquiries, 11 of which related to Ballymena District Council Area. The North Eastern Regional Office is awaiting postcode verification for 8 of its enquiries and it is likely that a number of these also relate to Ballymena Council Area.

25 initial advice sessions have been held and 7 individuals have attended group business clinics. To date no Business Plans have been completed.

Strategic Energy Framework

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the commitment in the Strategic Energy Framework to 'contribute' to the UK's annual 1 percent energy consumption reduction target, to detail her Department's target for annual energy consumption in Northern Ireland by 2020.

(AQW 4199/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Energy End Use Efficiency and Energy Services Directive was implemented in 2008 and requires all member states to reduce total energy demand by 1% per annum to 2016. In line with the current Strategic Energy Framework my officials have been collating information from the main providers of energy efficiency programmes in Northern Ireland. Accessing this information and ensuring that there is no double counting of energy savings has been a slow process since there is often a nine month time lag on data provision from the various contributors.

Interim results for 2009/10 will shortly be available and should indicate progress against the 1% target.

Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all the current public contracts within her Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender.

(AQW 4215/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

Title of Contract	To Whom Contract was Awarded	How Contract was Advertised	When Contract is next due for tender
Assessment of the Future Prospects for Improving the Quality of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to NI	fDi Intelligence Ltd	Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) Website, Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and Newsletter	This is a one-off piece of research so will not be re-tendered
Telephone Debt Advice Helpline 2009/11 (contract has been extended for 1 year until 31 March 2012)	A4e	CPD Website	All 3 debt advice contracts will expire on 31 March 2012. In late 2011, the Department plans to launch a new public tender exercise.
Face to Face Debt Advice Service 2009/11 (contract has been extended for 1 year until 31 March 2012)	Advice NI	CPD Website	All 3 debt advice contracts will expire on 31 March 2012. In late 2011, the Department plans to launch a new public tender exercise.
Face to Face Debt Advice Service 2011/12	Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	CPD Website	All 3 debt advice contracts will expire on 31 March 2012. In late 2011, the Department plans to launch a new public tender exercise.
Wayleaves Technical Consultancy	DMD Consultants (NI) Ltd	CPD Website	March 2012
Offshore Grid Strategic Environmental Assessment	Aecom Ltd	CPD Website	N/A
Onshore Renewable Electricity Action Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment	Aecom Ltd	CPD Website	N/A

Title of Contract	To Whom Contract was Awarded	How Contract was Advertised	When Contract is next due for tender
Isles Project consultancy (NI/ROI and Scottish Governments) technical feasibility study re development of offshore transmission network linking potential sites for the generation of renewable energy in the coastal waters of NI, Western Scotland and Ireland.	RPS Group plc	Via Public procurement by Scottish Government as lead partner	N/A
Energy Specialist Legal Advice	Arthur Cox NI	CPD Website	Jan 2014 if option to extend current contract for a 3rd year is exercised.
Supplier Obligation Study	AEA	CPD Website	N/A
Advertising & Related Services in support of Uniting Sustainable Energy Messaging in NI	Navigator Blue	CPD Website	Possible re-tender 2015 if option to extend contract for further 2 yrs exercised.
Renewable Heat Incentive Admin – Feasibility Study	Ofgem	Approved Single Tender Action	N/A
Business Case appraisals	RSM McClure Watters	CPD Website	N/A
IT Consultancy services to design and create website and e zine magazine and site hosting and maintenance	Kevin McGrath Starfish Web Consulting Ltd 1a Wellington Park BELFAST BT9 6DJ	CPD Website	N/A
Impress (Registry) Support – File Management Software	ICS Equinity	CPD Website	Not to be renewed
Insolvency System Case Management Software	BT	CPD Website	Tender 2013/14
Escrow Agreements	NCC Services	Approved Single Tender Action	Tender 2012/13
Multi Function Devices - Lease	Xerox Finance	CPD Website	Tender 2011/12
HSENI Case Management System maintenance	Singularity	CPD Website	Tender 2013/14
Trading Standards (Flare) Licence Management Software	Civica	CPD Website	Tender 2012/13
DETI Working Mines	Atkins	CPD Website	30 April 2013
DETI Airborne Geophysical Survey 2011	Sander Geophysics Ltd	Through CPD in NI and ROI press and European Journal	One-off contract, not to be repeated.
Agreement for the Provision of Remote Broadband Services in NI	Avanti	CPD Website	Replacement contract currently being procured.
Consultancy support to monitor the Remote Broadband Services Contract 2009-2012	Analysys Mason	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
Agreement for the Provision of an International Telecommunications Service	Hibernia Atlantic Cable Systems	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.

Title of Contract	To Whom Contract was Awarded	How Contract was Advertised	When Contract is next due for tender
North West International Connectivity (Project Kelvin) Consultant Support during (a) Project Roll out Phase and (b) Operational Phase	Analysys Mason	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
DETI Broadband Support Service aimed at the NI SME Community	Commendium	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
DETI Broadband Support Service aimed at the NI SME Community – Mid-Point Review	Ekosgen	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
Agreement relating to the Provision of Next Generation Broadband Access to Business in NI	BT	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
Technical Consultant Support for Next Generation Network Access	Analysys Mason	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
DETI NGBP Extension 1a	BT	Competitive fund	No plans at present to repeat contract.
WiMAX Fixed Wireless Access Distribution Infill (Northeast and Southern regions)	North West Electronics	Competitive fund	No plans at present to repeat contract.
Economic Appraisal for Improvement in Telecommunications Networks	RSM McClure Watters	CPD Website	No plans at present to repeat contract.
Analysis of Continental Airlines Belfast/Newark Route	AviaSolutions	Direct award contract	Contract will cease when work has been completed. There will not therefore be a requirement to re-tender.

Vulnerable Village and Corner Shops

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department can take to protect vulnerable village and corner shops from closure due to the increasing number of multi-national stores that are opening.

(AQW 4222/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive as a whole has a clear interest in ensuring the continuing success of small local businesses and I continue to liaise with my Ministerial colleagues to keep the overall environment within which they operate under review.

The Finance Minister recently consulted on proposals for rebalancing the non-domestic rating system which included expanding the small business rate relief scheme, funded through a levy on large retail properties with a rateable value of £500,000 or more. While these proposals were not designed specifically to arrest the growing trend for out of town retailing, the measures are likely to do more for town centres than edge of town and out of town developments.

The Finance Minister has also indicated that, in order to improve the vitality of shopping areas, he would be examining the feasibility of providing a rates concession to assist the reopening of shops that have been empty for a long time.

My Department, or the Executive as a whole, cannot address directly the specific issue of competition between local shops and large chain stores. This is because competition policy is a matter reserved by the UK Government under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the assessment that hydraulic fracturing caused the recent earthquakes in Blackpool, what impact this may have on her Department's future plans for hydraulic fracturing.

(AQW 4226/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Measurements made on thousands of hydraulic fracture treatments have shown that these may trigger minor earthquakes, usually with a magnitude less than 0 on the Richter scale, which cause no damage at the ground surface. The two

seismic events recorded near Blackpool (magnitude 2.3 and 1.5) are attributed to injected fluids penetrating and causing minor slip on a fault zone. Whilst the Blackpool seismicity is linked to unusual site-specific geological conditions, the specialists' report makes a number of recommendations for the evaluation and mitigation of seismic hazard. My Department will discuss these with DECC before making any decisions on seismic monitoring and mitigation protocols for Northern Ireland.

Petroleum Licence Awarded to Tamboran

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of the amount of shale gas that is available as part of the Petroleum Licence awarded to Tamboran; (ii) what is the wholesale value of that gas at current market prices; (iii) where Tamboran plans to export the gas if it is extracted; and (iv) to outline the benefits to the residents of County Fermanagh of the award of this licence, given that there is no existing gas infrastructure in Fermanagh.

(AQW 4228/11-15)

Mrs Foster: At this stage of exploration, before the shale gas potential of the licence area has been tested or Tamboran has fully developed their plans, it would be inappropriate and unrealistic for me to provide the information requested.

Fuel Prices

Ms Lewis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what her Department is doing to ensure that fuel prices are kept at a fair level.

(AQW 4266/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Wholesale fuel costs are set by international markets and, in addition, my Department has no direct role in the determination of electricity and natural gas retail tariffs. However, my officials do work closely with the Utility Regulator and the energy industry to establish, where possible, measures to put downward pressure on prices through promoting effective competition, enhancing interconnection, and improving market integration with other regions.

Among the tangible steps taken has been the opening to competition of the natural gas supply market in Greater Belfast and the electricity supply market across Northern Ireland. The creation of the Single Electricity Market since November 2007 has provided greater transparency, and an increased number of electricity suppliers in the retail electricity market, thus acting to put downward pressure on retail electricity tariffs.

This year's energy price increases by Power NI, Phoenix Supply in Greater Belfast, and firmus energy in their "10 towns" gas licensed area outside Belfast, have been subject to rigorous review by the Utility Regulator and are largely due to cost increases in wholesale energy markets.

My Department has also supported the mutualisation of energy assets such as the Scotland to Northern Ireland gas pipeline, the Moyle electricity interconnector, and the Belfast gas transmission pipeline which has helped to reduce costs to gas and electricity consumers, through the use of profits and reserves to help off-set energy costs.

Coal, home heating oil, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and road fuels all operate within mature and competitive markets and are not subject to formal regulation by any government body in Northern Ireland.

Retail prices for refined fuels in Northern Ireland respond to fluctuating wholesale prices and are set internationally. These and the tax levied on road fuels are outside the control of my Department.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any communication that has been received by the Health and Safety Executive in relation to the Village redevelopment area; and any action that has been taken in response.

(AQW 4294/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since 12 September 2011, HSENI has received a total of twelve telephone calls and emails raising safety concerns, arising amongst other things, from the theft of bricks from houses being demolished as part of the Village redevelopment scheme. Although HSENI has no powers to act in such circumstances, it has met with the key stakeholders in an attempt to find a workable solution.

Strategic Energy Framework Implementation Plan

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that action number 42 in the Strategic Energy Framework implementation states 'to extend the availability of natural gas as a lower carbon fuel, where it is economically viable to do so, and where not, maximise other alternatives such as renewable heat and/or biomass', why she has prioritised the development of gas over and above that of renewable heat sources.

(AQW 4371/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I consider that natural gas continues to provide fuel choice for consumers, and that this choice should be extended, where it is economically viable, to other areas in Northern Ireland. I am also keen to explore how gas infrastructure can be utilised in future for bio-gas.

You will be aware my Department has recently consulted on the development of the renewable heat market in Northern Ireland and outlined appropriate measures that could stimulate the growth of renewable heat to a market share of 10% by 2020.

The extension of the gas network and the incentivisation of the renewable heat market will support the development of a more secure, sustainable and diverse heat market which isn't overly reliant on one particular fuel and provides greater choice for consumers and businesses. I look forward to exploring how both energy sources can be developed in a complementary way.

Cultural Sector

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what additional resources her Department will put in place to promote the cultural sector as an attraction for tourists.

(AQW 4377/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The next two years represent an unprecedented opportunity to highlight Northern Ireland culture to a global audience. Additional funds have therefore been allocated to the "NI 2012 Our Time Our Place" campaign which will focus on our culture and heritage. It is expected that this programme will significantly boost visitor numbers well beyond 2012 and provide a great lead in to 2013 when Londonderry becomes City of Culture and Belfast hosts the World Police and Fire Games.

With respect to specific project funding, the cultural sector can apply for assistance from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Tourism Development Scheme and Tourism Events Funding Programme.

To help prepare for 2012 and 2013 Tourism Ireland has been raising Northern Ireland's cultural profile through the promotion of Belfast City of Music and Londonderry UK City of Culture, implementing an Ulster-Scots campaign in the Southern States of the US, highlighting Northern Ireland's Christian heritage, promoting the Belfast Festival at Queens and showcasing Northern Ireland food.

In addition, over the next 12 months Tourism Ireland will invest in the most extensive global marketing programme ever undertaken for Northern Ireland. This will showcase the diverse and unique cultural events which will take place throughout Northern Ireland during 2012 and 2013.

Feasibility of Social Tariffs for Electricity Supplies

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will examine the feasibility of social tariffs for electricity supplies to social housing schemes.

(AQW 4399/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am already on record as stating that the introduction of a social tariff would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty.

DETI: Air Travel Costs

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total cost incurred by her Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4411/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The total cost incurred by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment on air travel, January to December 2010:

- (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport - £17200
- (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain - £21524

(excluding Heathrow Airport)

Invest NI's Funding to the Carbon Trust

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the removal of InvestNI's funding to the Carbon Trust.

(AQW 4454/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Some £30 million of support has been provided to Carbon Trust since it established an office in Northern Ireland in 2002 but I wish to clarify that Invest NI has not "removed" funding from the Carbon Trust. In 2011/12 Carbon Trust has been offered £2.6 million which includes: £1 million capital for an energy efficiency loan fund, £746,000 to support applied research projects and almost £1 million to provide energy efficiency support to business in Northern Ireland.

It is Invest NI's intention that Carbon Trust would continue to manage the existing Energy Efficiency Loan Fund between now and 2014/15 but this is currently the subject of negotiation. Regardless of the outcome of those negotiations, Invest NI is planning to ensure that a loan fund will continue to be available to local businesses and is planning to provide an additional

£1 million per annum up to 2014/15 to the loan fund which currently has of the order of £8.5 million vested in it.

An offer has also been made to Carbon Trust to extend a previous offer that will allow expenditure on applied research projects to be supported until 31 March 2013.

In terms of its forward plans, Invest NI has undertaken an independent appraisal which was informed by industry representations and input from relevant stakeholders. This appraisal recommended that resource efficiency support for business be simplified and simplification is what Invest NI is striving to achieve.

In planning to implement this recommendation and in line with government procurement policy, Invest NI has recently tendered for the provision of resource efficiency expertise embracing the full arena of energy, water, waste and materials. Carbon Trust has had the opportunity to bid in this tender which closed in October but no bid was received.

I am assured by Invest NI that the successful delivery of services in this area will be maintained and I would urge all Members to exert their influence on businesses to encourage them to avail of the support on offer from Invest NI, which could make the difference in these challenging economic times.

Introduction of Social Tariffs

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he intends to prioritise the introduction of social tariffs in the Programme for Government.

(AQW 4457/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am already on record as stating that the introduction of a social tariff would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty.

Telecommunications

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the powers her department has in relation to telecommunications.

(AQW 4471/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In February 2011 my Department distributed a fact sheet to all MLAs and District Councils in which it set out the powers under which it has the ability to intervene in the telecommunications market.

Telecommunications policy is a reserved matter for which the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in Whitehall has lead responsibility. Furthermore, the UK Telecommunications market is both fully privatised and competitive and operates primarily on a UK-wide basis.

Primary legislation for telecommunications matters is the Communications Act 2003. Section 149 of this legislation gives DETI a general power to make payments to persons engaged in or in commercial activities connected with:

- (a) the provision of electronic communications networks and electronic communications services in Northern Ireland; or
- (b) improving the extent, quality and reliability of such networks or services

Over the last number of years DETI has exercised those powers to make a series of strategically important investments, working with the private sector, to ensure that broadband services are available across all of Northern Ireland, to strengthen international communications links and, to ensure that the opportunities available through the better use of the facilities provided by these investments are being exploited by Northern Ireland businesses.

Earlier this year, the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport announced that a review of the Communications Act 2003 was to be undertaken. It is understood that proposals for the amendment of the Act are currently being developed by DCMS and will, in due course, be subject to a public consultation.

Fuel Poverty

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether he plans to help low-income families alleviate fuel poverty by encouraging energy companies to offer fairer social tariffs to low-income customers.

(AQW 4477/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am already on record as stating that the introduction of a social tariff would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty.

Assembly Questions: Cost

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the average cost to her Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4664/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and so the information requested is not available.

Social Tariffs: Introduction

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the introduction of social tariffs.

(AQW 4709/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am already on record as stating that the introduction of a social tariff would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty.

Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the public appointments both she and her predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4752/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Public appointments made by DETI Ministers since May 2007 are detailed in OFMDFM, Central Appointment Unit's Public Appointments Annual Report for 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and their Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2009/2010.

The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report for 2010/2011 will be published in due course in the normal manner.

The reports are available on the OFMDFM website under the heading 'Making Government Work' – 'Public Appointments'.

Tourism Ireland

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on how Tourism Ireland plans to market Northern Ireland within Great Britain in 2012.

(AQO 829/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Sustaining growth in the Great Britain market will be a top priority in 2012. ni2012 represents an unprecedented opportunity for Northern Ireland. I have secured additional funds to enable Tourism Ireland to deliver the most extensive programme of marketing activity ever undertaken for Northern Ireland in Great Britain. This will include media, cinema advertising, online campaigns, social media activity and promotional events and publicity.

Tourism Ireland will be launching their Marketing Plans for 2012 on 1st December, when further details of the plans for Great Britain will be outlined.

Agrifood: InterTradelreland Report

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she will publish InterTradelreland's report 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation'.

(AQO 830/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQO 681/11-15.

Economic Strategy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the Northern Ireland Executive Economic Strategy will be implemented.

(AQO 831/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy, which deals with the period up to 2030, was published for full public consultation on Thursday 17 November 2011. The Strategy has been developed by an Executive Sub-Committee on the economy which I chair. It includes commitments from all Executive Departments.

Go For It Programme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the full complement of services offered by the Go For It programme will be restored.

(AQO 832/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is prevented from delivering a fully functional Business Start Programme as a result of legal action taken by Enterprise Northern Ireland.

It is expected that the legal challenge will be heard by the High Court in February 2012, with judgement being given several weeks later. There is, however, the possibility that the court date might move or that the decision would be subject to an appeal. The award date for the contract for the Business Start Programme cannot, therefore, be known with certainty.

Economy: MTV Music Awards

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the economic benefits generated by the MTV Europe Music Awards.

(AQO 833/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The event is anticipated to generate £10 million into the economy and industry reported 95% occupancy in the Greater Belfast area over the MTV weekend.

I am pleased to report that an online travel company has reported that online searches for Belfast have dramatically increased following last weekend's MTV European Music Awards in the city. Figures show that searches have risen by 300% in Germany, 200% in France, 61% in GB and 17% in US compared to the same period last year.

Research and Development

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the announcement that Research and Development spend has increased, how she plans to promote further Research and Development activity which, historically, has been low.

(AQO 834/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Research and Development is a key driver of economic growth and is central to our attempts to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy. We therefore need Northern Ireland companies to continue to invest in R&D, particularly in those niche markets identified by Matrix, where we have the potential to develop a competitive global advantage. I am therefore committed to enhancing the programmes that can offer support to companies, particularly SME's, to make the decision to invest in R&D. The recent record expenditure of £521.4 million on R&D in 2010 is very positive and over the next four years Invest NI will commit over £117million to support continued business investment in R&D.

Foreign Direct Investment: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is InvestNI's estimate of the number of Foreign Direct Investment visits that it will have promoted to the East Londonderry constituency in the current calendar year.

(AQO 835/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has facilitated 3 visits by international companies to East Londonderry in the current calendar year. There are no current plans for any upcoming visits in the East Londonderry constituency between now and the end of this current calendar year; Invest NI will, however, continue to pursue any opportunities to secure further visits as the opportunity arises.

The objective of an inward investor visit is to demonstrate to the visiting company how locating in Northern Ireland will help its business to grow and thrive. Invest NI works closely with the company to develop a programme which is driven by the specific requirements of the potential project. The potential investor will then make the final decision about which locations to visit.

Invest NI works closely with councils and other stakeholders to review the features and benefits of each local area in order to maximise opportunities for economic growth. For example, Invest Northern Ireland attended a stakeholder event with members of Coleraine Borough Council's Economic Development team and local businesses at the Flowerfield Arts Centre on 30 March 2011 as part of its annual sales conference.

Tourism: Rory McIlroy

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she has taken to capitalise on the tourism potential of Rory McIlroy's recent achievements in China at the Shanghai Masters and at the HSBC World Championship event.

(AQO 836/11-15)

Mrs Foster: With Rory McIlroy now achieving a player ranking of number 2 in the world, this can only increase the potential for golf tourism in Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland has highlighted Northern Ireland golf in key golfing publications in China such as Golf Vacation, Golf Digest and Golf Magazine. In September, golf writers from Golf Digest China and Golf Magazine China travelled to Northern Ireland to play the courses where Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke perfected their skills.

Invest NI: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether InvestNI has any plans to focus more on small and medium-sized enterprises.

(AQO 837/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the last five years, over 11,000 offers have been issued to SMEs, generating almost £950 million of investment in the local economy and accounting for 84% of Invest NI's offer activity.

Support for companies of this size will continue to be a key focus for my Department and Invest NI. SMEs which qualify for full Invest NI support have access to the agency's extensive Business Development Solutions portfolio. This consists of professional advice, assistance, both financial and non-financial and support for businesses across a range of key areas including Strategy Development, People Development, R&D and Exporting.

Those SMEs that do not qualify for Invest NI financial support can still continue to benefit from many of the agency's wider services. These include export development programmes for both first-time exporters and more experienced exporters, energy and environmental efficiency support, comprehensive business information services and information and communications technology support.

Invest NI's information website, nibusinessinfo.co.uk, provides free access to key information, advice, funding and training. With over 5,000 pages of relevant information, the site is written by business people for business people and offers extensive knowledge in one online location.

Department of the Environment

PPS 24

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of his decision not to proceed with PPS 24, how he intends to ensure that economic factors are taken into account in the consideration of planning applications.

(AQW 1807/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Economic factors have always been key related material considerations to be considered in the determination of a planning application and they continue to be so.

A range of measures also exists to ensure that the Department prioritises economic factors when considering planning applications. These include, but this is not exhaustive:

Two Strategic Project teams within the Strategic Projects Division (SPD) manage planning applications across NI for all large scale investment proposals including all applications designated under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. They also process other economically significant applications, which, while not classified by Article 31, are nevertheless important to the NI economy.

Guidance on consistency in decision making with particular emphasis on economic considerations issued to planning staff in May 2011. The purpose was to ensure a consistent approach in the consideration of the economic merits of planning applications by the Department so that local communities are treated equally and not disadvantaged.

Further guidance for prioritising planning applications in Local Planning Division issued in May 2011 stating clearly the types of applications that should be considered for prioritising. These include applications with employment implications, social/community benefit or a public interest dimension and applications which are grant funded.

The Executive's ongoing priority to create a vibrant economy facilitating increased employment, economic recovery and improved future wealth is set out in this guidance and it is stressed that the planning system has a key role to play in achieving this high level government objective.

In addition, PPS 4, PPS 5, PPS 6, PPS 18, PPS 21, PPS 16 (draft), PPS 23 (draft) and various plans also assist in making positive planning decisions with economic benefits.

Moreover, as Minister, I plan to leave no stone unturned in identifying all and any measures to ensure proper and quick planning industry: revision of the HR plan; active management of Article 31 applications; new regulations around planning appeals; tighter timelines for decisions; proper flexibilities around PPS 21 decisions; appropriate interventions to assist renewable energy applications etc; ensuring that environmental and traffic issues are properly assessed, based on good evidence and not raised late in the application process on a piecemeal basis.

Planning Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment how he intends to ensure that the Planning Service prioritises economic factors when considering planning applications.

(AQW 2036/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A range of measures already exist to ensure that the Department prioritises economic factors when considering planning applications. These include:

Two Strategic Project teams within the Strategic Projects Division (SPD) manage planning applications across NI for all large scale investment proposals including all applications designated under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. They also process other economically significant applications, which, while not classified by Article 31, are nevertheless important to the NI economy.

Economic and resource factors have always been key related material considerations to be considered in the determination of a planning application and they continue to be so.

Guidance on consistency in decision making with particular emphasis on economic considerations issued to planning staff in May 2011. The purpose was to ensure a consistent approach in the consideration of the economic merits of planning applications by the Department so that local communities are treated equally and not disadvantaged.

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As Minister, I plan to leave no stone unturned in identifying all and any measures to ensure proper and quick planning industry: revision of the HR plan; active management of Article 31 applications; new regulations around planning appeals; tighter timelines for decisions; proper flexibilities around PPS 21 decisions; appropriate interventions to assist renewable energy applications etc; ensuring that environmental and traffic issues are properly assessed, based on good evidence and not raised late in the application process on a piecemeal basis.

Applications for Multiple Wind Turbines

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many applications for multiple wind turbines have been submitted in the past two years; (ii) how many of these applications were approved; and (iii) what is the potential electricity output of the turbine applications awaiting approval.

(AQW 2338/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) Six wind farm applications in 2010 and 15 in 2011 have been submitted.
- (ii) None of these applications have been determined to date. These are complex applications accompanied by environmental statements. Consultations are wide ranging and the time required to prepare and consider further environmental information in support of each application causes the processing time to be extended. I established a small group of people in the renewables industry to identify how the Planning Service could better assist the processing of renewable applications.

It should be noted that in the same 2 year period [2010-2011] 16 other windfarm applications have been approved with a potential electricity output of 292MW

- (iii) These 21 applications have a potential electricity output of 400 MW.

Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1964

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider introducing legislation to update the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1964 to enhance the record keeping requirements for people buying and selling scrap metal.

(AQW 2631/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The theft of metal is an international problem with unprecedented demand from the Far East pushing up worldwide prices of metals to an all time high. Whilst the big majority scrap metal dealers are legitimate and law-abiding, there are a few unscrupulous dealers who are facilitating the theft of metals.

In Great Britain, the Home Office has set up a working group tasked with recommending how this crime can be tackled effectively. The Group is chaired by British Transport Police and comprises representatives from law enforcement, the utilities sector and government departments.

In the first instance, the working group will focus on the prevention of metal theft. However, it is accepted that resolution of the problem may also require amendment of waste management legislation. I have asked Departmental officials to keep me informed of developments; I can then assess whether existing NI waste management legislation needs to be changed.

External Consultants and External Media Services

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 2147/11-15, whether tendering and procurement procedures were followed by local councils in relation to the spend on external consultants and external media services, in particular those councils which have a high spend.

(AQW 2954/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information was sought directly from the 26 District Councils. Each council advised that their own internal procurement and tendering process was adhered to in the procurement of external consultancy and media services. I am looking further into this matter.

Townland Addresses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to ensure that residents living in Co Fermanagh can continue to use their townland as their principal address without the need for a road or street name being implemented.

(AQW 2985/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the current law, Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 sets out the powers of district councils in relation to street names. At present, townlands are not included in the definition of "street".

"Pointer" is the address database being developed for NI with the support of the Land and Property Services (DFP) and Royal Mail, in conjunction with local councils. Pointer will provide the common standard address for every property in NI and is intended to provide infrastructure support to private and public sector organisations. Currently, there are over 200 different address datasets in use within the NICS, all maintained and managed separately. Pointer will include a townland name for every address held on the database. There is a website dedicated to this project.

The Department of the Environment, in line with all other Departments, supports the policy of using and promoting townland names in all government correspondence and official documents which is in line with those relevant motions passed in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The use of townland names is being facilitated, with the Pointer process leading to the townland being part of addresses in NI.

I can confirm that I value the use of townlands in describing places and areas of residence. This brings character and a sense of place to address forms and is part of local identity.

Slurry Spreading

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment, following his announcement on the 11 October 2011 in relation to slurry spreading, to detail (i) what constitutes a 'reasonable excuse' to spread slurry after 15 October; (ii) what constitutes 'all reasonable steps'; and (iii) why his statement included the expression 'penalties may not apply' rather than penalties will not apply.

(AQW 3355/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I fully appreciate that farmers have faced difficult circumstances over the past few weeks preventing them from spreading slurry. I provided a written statement to the Assembly on 18 October 2011 and took an urgent oral on the matter.

- (i) 'Reasonable excuse' has an accepted legal meaning of something beyond the control of, and not foreseeable by an individual. In the context of slurry spreading, wet weather is something a farmer would normally be expected to anticipate. Farmers are required to have sufficient storage both for the closed period and for periods of adverse weather conditions when, due to extended wet weather, spreading of organic manure is not permitted.
- (ii) NIEA would regard 'all reasonable steps' as including that the farmer had sufficient slurry storage in accordance with the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations, and had been properly managing slurry outside the closed period. Clean storm water, e.g. roof water, should be diverted from slurry storage tanks. Farmers should also have exhausted reasonable alternatives such as renting extra storage space or using straw bedding.

In addition, it will be expected that slurry had been spread on low risk land, and that steps had been taken to protect watercourses. It would also be expected that farmers would not totally empty tanks – they should only remove enough slurry to provide adequate containment for immediate needs.

- (iii) It must be emphasised that farms will be looked at on a case-by-case basis, as individual circumstances will vary considerably. I have made it clear that my Department will work to the full to assist farmers with 'reasonable excuse'. However, farmers who do not have an excuse and who do not act reasonably may not expect to have the assistance of my Department.

Staff Cars Provided by Department

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many departmental staff currently have cars provided by his Department; and the cost of providing cars in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3982/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department does not provide staff with cars for private use.

However, the Department does own 136 vehicles which are used for Departmental operational purposes, such as driver examiner training and roadside enforcement, and functions relating to country parks, nature reserves, state care monuments, etc.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the current regulations in place require that companies wishing to conduct or who are conducting hydraulic fracturing make a full declaration of all hazardous materials being used in the process; and to detail any hazardous materials that are exempt from declaration.

(AQW 4019/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have been advised by officials that any proposal for shale gas fracturing would require planning permission separate to any licences granted by DETI. DOE Planning & Local Government Group has not received any planning applications for shale gas fracturing in Northern Ireland to date.

Any planning application for shale gas fracturing would be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. EIA is the process for identifying the environmental effects of proposed developments before planning permission is granted.

The EIA process and the consultation inherent to the planning process requires full disclosure of hazardous materials required for hydraulic fracturing.

Before any of the Company's proposals can be progressed, they would need to have a consent to discharge, under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and a licence for water abstraction under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 from NIEA Water Management Unit (WMU). NIEA WMU will enforce the conditions of any issued consent or licence in line with NIEA's Enforcement and Prosecution Policy.

Other permissions and assessments may be required from NIEA depending upon the activities proposed by the company and their exact location in relation to sensitive environmental receptors.

Planning Policy Requirement

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will review the planning policy requirement that people who live on farms are required to have a farm ID number before they can apply to build a domestic dwelling in the countryside.

(AQW 4072/11-15)

Mr Attwood: An applicant need not have a farm ID number to be eligible for a farm dwelling under the provisions of PPS21 (CTY 10), provided he or she can adequately demonstrate that the farm business is active and has been established for at least 6 years, and the proposal satisfies all other relevant policy criteria. There is, therefore, no need to review PPS21 on this matter.

Renewable Energy Related Proposals: Planning Applications

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for renewable energy related proposals have been refused in each of the last four years.

(AQW 4172/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the year 2007/08 8 applications were refused, in 2008/09 18 applications were refused, in 2009/10 25 applications were refused and in 2010/11 24 applications were refused. In the first quarter of the current business year 2011/12, 7 applications have been refused.

PPS 16

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on PPS 16.

(AQW 4216/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following public consultation on draft PPS 16, there was close engagement with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board over the summer.

The Environment Committee will consider the outcome of the consultation on 24th November and I will take account of the Committee's comments in finalising PPS16 for submission to the Executive.

Dog Fouling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to address further the problem of dog fouling.

(AQW 4227/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under Article 4 of the Litter (NI) Order 1994 ("the 1994 Order") it is currently an offence to permit a dog to foul. A person found guilty of this offence shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 2 on the standard scale (currently £500). Under Article 6 of the 1994 Order a person may be offered the opportunity to discharge that liability by the payment of a fixed penalty which is currently £50.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ("the 2011 Act") will strengthen the law in relation to dog fouling by the introduction of a new system of dog control orders. Breach of a dog control order will be an offence and the penalty on summary conviction will be a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale (currently £1,000). The 2011 Act will also give a district council the flexibility to set the amount of fixed penalty payable in its district within the range £50 to £80. If a council does not set an amount, the default will be £75.

It is intended to bring the provisions of the 2011 Act into operation in April 2012.

Listed Buildings

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many listed buildings have been demolished in the last three years without the permission of the Planning Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

(AQW 4229/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of cases investigated in each of the last 3 business years categorised on the Departments IT data base with a breach type of Works to Listed Buildings involving demolition is set out in the table below.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total
Number of Works to Listed Building cases involving demolition	3	4	0	7

I have asked for an update on what further action has been taken in each of the seven cases. I will update the Member in due course.

Gransha Boys' High School, Bangor: Land

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment, under the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, for what use is land at the old Gransha Boys High School, Bangor, designated.

(AQW 4231/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP), published in November 2004, designates the area of land which was formally the site of Gransha Boys High School predominately for education use i.e. Proposal BR 35 – Education Use – Clanmorris, Gransha Road.

The remainder of the site (approximately 4 hectares) which was previously used as playing fields, is zoned for housing in BMAP under Zoning BR 05/10 – Playing fields at Clanmorris Campus, Balloo Road.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) were consulted as part of the plan preparation process.

No objections were received to the Education Use proposal in the Draft Plan. However, the SEELB submitted an objection to the Housing Zoning proposal and stated that the land should be retained for education use. This objection was subsequently withdrawn.

In March 2009, planning permission was granted on the part of the site that is designated for education use, for the demolition of existing buildings; construction of a new 850 pupil grammar school; synthetic pitches with floodlighting; grass pitches with 9m high ball-stop netting behind rugby posts; tennis courts; site works; car parking and ancillary works.

In the absence of objections to these specific proposals within BMAP it is likely that they will be contained in the final Plan.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail the number of archaeologists employed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last five years; and (ii) whether the Agency has an adequate number of staff to assess and protect archaeological sites and monuments to ensure that they are protected from inappropriate change or damage from development activity.

(AQW 4293/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Provided below is a break-down of the number of archaeologists employed in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of archaeologists in post (posts identified rise in rank from Curatorial Grade F to C)	12	11	12	13	13

These posts have been supported over most of the last five years by an Archaeological Support Contract. However due to budget difficulties in 2011/12 the support contract ended in May 2011 and was not replaced at that time.

This combination of in-house and contracted staff had been sufficient to meet the Department's prioritised responsibilities in archaeological matters.

A new contract has recently been awarded that focuses on planning-related archaeological work. Approximately eight people are involved in delivering this service through a private company, of whom seven are archaeologists.

In the intervening period the Agency was not able to meet its target for responding to Planning consultations. The new arrangement is expected to resolve this. The contract will be kept under review by NIEA.

Cost of Air Travel

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total cost incurred his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4343/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department incurred the following costs on air travel:

- (i) Between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010 - £20,304.
- (ii) Between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010 - £56,326.

European Union Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is undertaking to ensure that Northern Ireland complies with the European Union Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive; and whether he has any concerns about compliance with these Directives.

(AQW 4370/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The European Commission has instigated infraction proceedings against a number of Member States including the UK for alleged deficiencies in how the 'Wild Birds' Directive has been transposed into national legislation. The infraction against the UK involves all of the devolved administrations and the Department is working closely with the other UK authorities in order to address the Commission's concerns. Amending Regulations made in June 2011 address one aspect of the complaint. I am confident that the work being undertaken by the Department on further amending Regulations will address the remaining issues and satisfy the Commission that we are fully compliant with the Directive.

In respect of the Habitats Directive the Commission previously instigated proceedings arising from concerns about deterioration of a designated feature in the Strangford Lough Special Area of Conservation, namely the Horse Mussel (*Modiolus*) Biogenic Reefs. A joint DARD/DOE 3 year project, known as the *Modiolus* Restoration Research Project (MRRP), undertaken by Queens University has recently been completed. The MRRP aimed to advance restoration of the *Modiolus* beds and a recent report from the MRRP recommended additional actions to protect; restore and monitor the restoration of the *Modiolus* beds. I am determined that an action plan will be developed to assist restoration. I continue to press DARD to bring this about, to mitigate the risk of infraction, to ensure no significant economic loss and to ensure the lough develops positively.

Hydropowered Economy

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to help make Northern Ireland a hydro powered economy.
(AQW 4381/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am keen to promote hydroelectric developments as reflected in my Department's planning policy. PPS18 aims to facilitate all forms of renewable energy generating facilities in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable energy targets and to realise the benefits of renewable energy. In addition, the associated Best Practice Guidance details all other consents and authorisations required.

Hydroelectric Power

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what regulations and guidelines he intends to put in place to ensure that hydroelectric power is installed in a manner that is representative of the relevant stakeholders' needs and views.

(AQW 4382/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Best Practice Guidance accompanying PPS18 'Renewable Energy' provides advice and information on hydroelectric developments and their installation. The views of stakeholders are sought through the public notices, neighbour notifications and consultations associated with any planning application.

Plastic Bag Levy in Wales

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the implementation of the Plastic Bag Levy in Wales; and if any lessons can be learned in relation to the collection of the Levy.

(AQW 4425/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The levy scheme introduced in Wales does bear some comparison to my proposals for Northern Ireland. Significantly, neither scheme is confined to single use plastic bags; they both apply to all single use bags, including those made of paper.

There are however a number of major differences. In Wales, retailers are expected to distribute the profits to good causes. In Northern Ireland retailers will be required to forward the proceeds of the levy to central government. It will then be used to fund environmental projects and other government priorities.

In addition, the Welsh levy covers only single use bags. In due course I plan to extend the Northern Ireland levy to certain types of reusable bags; this will require new primary legislation.

In spite of these differences, there is still a great deal we can learn from the expertise and experience of those responsible for the development of the levy in Wales. Departmental officials have already had significant contact with their Welsh counterparts prior to the implementation of the levy in Wales on 1 October; further meetings are planned as the Welsh scheme becomes established. Similar exchanges are taking place with colleagues in Ireland. This engagement will assist us greatly in preparing for the implementation of the Northern Ireland levy.

Blue Flag Beaches

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment whether any analysis has been carried out to establish how clean Northern Ireland's blue flag beaches are in comparison with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 4426/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All Blue Flag beaches across the UK must meet the 'Excellent' standard of the EC Bathing Water Directive. The percentage of Northern Ireland's bathing waters meeting the 'Excellent' standard in 2011 compares very favourably with the rest of the UK. Based on the water quality criteria, 20 of our 24 bathing waters (83%) are eligible to apply for the Blue Flag in 2012. The overall percentage of UK bathing waters meeting 'Excellent' standard was 77%, with only Wales bettering the Northern Ireland performance (93%).

In addition, all 24 of our bathing beaches met the mandatory standards, making the 2011 season our best performance for 15 years. Pollution prevention investment is really paying off.

The Blue Flag scheme, which is administered by Tidy Northern Ireland has 32 criteria that cover all aspects of beach management. Blue Flag is a quality mark for all of the facilities that beach users can expect including excellent water quality. Not all Bathing Water Operators apply to the Blue Flag Scheme even though they would be eligible under the water quality criteria. There may be deficiencies, for example in access or toilet provision that cannot easily be addressed. Just 7 of our local beaches were awarded the Blue Flag in 2011, although 9 others were awarded either the Seaside or the Green Coast Award.

I have recently hosted two Good Beach Summits. The four-strand Action Plan specifically identified that increased participation in award schemes would help to support the coastal economy. I have already written to all of our coastal councils and other beach operators to encourage increased participation in such schemes.

I firmly believe that in Northern Ireland improved environmental quality can go hand in hand with improved economic opportunity. The more both local and overseas visitors enjoy our great natural assets, the more will be spent locally and the stronger our economy will become.

Planning Management Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how many planning application decisions have been referred to the Planning Management Board in each of the last five years, and of these, how many decisions have been overturned.

(AQW 4434/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below shows the number of planning applications referred to the Planning Management Board in each of the last five calendar years, and of those, the number of decisions which have been overturned.

	Number of applications referred for consideration as MBR	Number accepted as MBR	Number of MBRs where Decision Overturned
2010	39	1	0
2009	45	5	3
2008	44	10	5
2007	43	3	0
2006	62	3	0

Planning Management Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average length of time it takes the Planning Management Board to consider a referral and make a decision.

(AQW 4452/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of applications referred to and accepted by the Management Board in the last five years along with the median length of time to process them for each year is shown in the table below.

Year	Number applications Accepted as MBR	Median Length of time to process (days)
2010	1	29
2009	5	313
2008	10	207
2007	3	265
2006	3	446

Beatrice Road, Bangor: Planning Application

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has met, or intends to meet, with representatives of Sammy Mellons in relation to the planning application for Beatrice Road, Bangor; and, if so, whether he would be willing to meet with representatives of SOS Bangor, a residents' group which is opposed to the development.

(AQW 4491/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have not met nor do I have any plans to meet representatives of S Mellon & Sons Ltd in relation to their current planning application. The application (Ref: W/2010/0132/F) remains under consideration.

Landfill Sites

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost of using landfill sites in each of the last three years. (AQW 4524/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The cost of using landfill sites for the disposal of waste generally falls under Landfill Tax obligations and landfill site gate fees.

Landfill site operators are liable to pay Landfill Tax and may pass on the cost by way of increased charges to those disposing of waste at their sites. There are two rates of landfill tax – a standard rate (currently £56 per tonne) for active wastes such as household wastes which decay, and a lower rate (currently £2.50 per tonne) for inactive or inert wastes.

The standard and lower rates of landfill tax for the last three years are as follows:

Tax Year	Standard Rate of Landfill Tax (per tonne)	Lower Rate of Landfill Tax (per tonne)
2009/10	£40	£2.50
2010/11	£48	£2.50
2011/12	£56	£2.50

Landfill site operators may also charge a discretionary gate fee which may vary from operator to operator depending on market forces. The Department does not hold financial details on gate fees but the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) Gate Fees Report 2011 gives gate fees in Northern Ireland (excluding landfill tax and haulage) as ranging from £24 to £41 per tonne.

Department for Transport's Consultation Document 'Developing a Sustainable Framework for UK Aviation: Scoping Document'

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of chapter 4 of the Department for Transport's consultation document 'Developing a sustainable framework for aviation: scoping document' in relation to George Best Belfast City Airport. (AQW 4577/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials have provided comments to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) on certain noise aspects of the DfT scoping document. DRD is responsible for co-ordinating a Northern Ireland response to the consultation.

The comments provided were in relation to the impacts of aviation on local communities, sustainable surface access to airports, seeking clarification on the concept of a "noise envelope" around airports and new aircraft technology. DRD is facilitating this NICS wide consultation and the comments will feed into the overall response to DfT.

Allotments: Legislation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce legislation in relation to allotments. (AQW 4603/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Legislation already exists regarding the provision of allotments. The Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) 1932 (as amended) enables district councils in Northern Ireland to provide, at their discretion, allotments for use by residents in their areas. In providing allotments, the 1932 Act requires councils to make regulations concerning the control and management of their allotments.

The Department, as part of a suite of provisions to relax controls over certain functions of councils under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, removed the need for councils to seek Departmental approval throughout the 1932 Act.

Wind Turbines: Planning Applications

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average length of time the Planning Service takes to make a decision on a planning application for a wind turbine. (AQW 4651/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The median length of time it took to reach a decision on a planning application for wind turbines in 2010/11 was 120 working days or 24 weeks.

Renewable Energy: Planning Applications

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for renewable energy are awaiting decision. (AQW 4652/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is currently processing 861 planning applications for renewable energy development.

Department of Finance and Personnel

INTERREG IVA Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the INTERREG IVA Programme; and when further calls for funding will be made.

(AQW 4062/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): INTERREG IVA has been slow both to commit and to spend resources. DFP in liaising with SEUPB and the relevant accountable departments, has implemented a number of recent changes in an attempt to increase the speed of allocation and project spend of projects to ensure that EU spending targets are achieved and no funding decommitted.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is currently processing approximately forty applications for INTERREG IVA funding. It is expected that these will have been fully assessed by early 2012 after which there will be further calls until the remaining Programme budget has been allocated.

SEUPB will recommend on the number, value and thematic focus of envisaged calls once the current round of assessments is complete and the amount of resource still to be allocated has been confirmed.

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Northern Ireland Act 2011

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements have been put in place for people to apply for compensation under the Damages (Asbestos Related Conditions) Northern Ireland Act 2011.

(AQW 4103/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am currently considering the arrangements for the commencement of the Act. However, I would wish to emphasise that the Act merely allows for certain claims for damages to be made. It does not provide for an automatic payment of damages and my Department will have no role with regard to individual claims. Accordingly, when the Act is commenced, each claimant will have to pursue his or her own claim and must seek his or her own legal advice, which will take account of his or her circumstances.

Energy Brokering

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has considered using energy brokering across the public sector to reduce energy costs.

(AQW 4120/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) of my Department are proposing to put in place suitable structure and resources to undertake pan-government contracts for the procurement of common goods and services. One of these categories will be energy procurement. As part of the development of a procurement strategy for energy, CPD will review future needs and demands along with delivery options in consultation with the sector to ensure the agreed strategy provides the overall best value for money.

Unemployment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people have been unemployed for more than three years in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4152/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Labour Force Survey estimates detailing the number of people who have been unemployed, for three years or more, in each of the last five years can be found in the table below.

Number of people in Northern Ireland who have been unemployed for three years or more, 2007 - 2011.

Period	Total ¹
April - June 2007	5,000
April - June 2008	2,000
April - June 2009	6,000
April - June 2010	4,000
April - June 2011	7,000

¹ Estimates for those unemployed for three years or more are based on a relatively small sample size and are subject to a high degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution.

Source: Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey

Government Offices: Relocation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, when considering options for the relocation of Government offices, particularly departmental offices, what account will be taken of the unused land and property holdings owned by his Department which have a maintenance budget to be met.

(AQW 4200/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The first stage in any business case to consider relocation of NICS Government offices is the identification of a 'long list' of options. In refining this list the department in question takes account of potential solutions from within the existing government estate including consideration of surplus land or property holdings.

Savings associated with reduced on-going maintenance costs related to the existing land/property holdings are taken into account in the financial analysis which forms part of the assessment of the shortlisted options.

Ilex Urban Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked Minister of Finance and Personnel, with regard to the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4247/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Although supportive of the Ilex One Plan regeneration initiative and working in an advisory capacity, DFP has no direct involvement in terms of specific project delivery associated with the plan.

Rating of Vacant Properties

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the amount that will be raised by the rating of vacant properties in the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 4258/11-15)

Mr Wilson: When the Executive agreed to introduce the rating of empty homes in Northern Ireland my Department estimated the figure to be up to £10 million for the first full year of operation, that is 2012/13.

The measure was introduced on 1 October and already, LPS has sent out bills totalling £10 million for the half year. However, this is a new taxation measure and the collectable amount will be significantly less than that due to a number of reasons.

- Firstly, some owners may be able to legitimately claim that their properties are not capable of habitation without substantial repairs being carried out; in which case, these properties will be removed from the valuation list.
- Secondly, there are a number of exclusions from this measure, such as the person entitled to possession (which is usually the owner) is in a nursing home. There are also exclusions for homes subject to probate, 'listed' properties and for the first owner of new never occupied properties.
- Finally, it is expected that a number of properties will be occupied, becoming liable for rates in the normal way and therefore may not be counted directly as revenue realised from the rating of empty homes.

Nevertheless, I remain reasonably confident that the predicted revenue levels will be achieved. Having said that, if this measure is successful in bringing properties on to the market for sale or let, the direct revenues from the rating of empty homes are likely to diminish over time as ratepayers make decisions that will ensure they are occupied rather than lying vacant and incurring rates. Either way, this will increase the overall tax base by an equal amount.

Rates Debt

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the debt from rates that has been written-off by his Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4259/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Land & Property Services Rating debt that has been written-off in each year for the last five years for which information is available and published in the LPS Annual Report & Accounts and the previous Rate Collection Agency Annual Report and Accounts is shown in the table below.

Year	Written-off as Irrecoverable (Millions)
2006-07	£1.3
2007-08	£0.9
2008-09	£5.8
2009-10	£10.2
2010-11	£15.2

Unpaid Rates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the level of unpaid rates in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4260/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The amount of unpaid rates is available for the last two years (2009/10 and 2010/11) only. At the end of March 2011 a total of £89M was left unpaid for the rating assessments raised during the 2010/11 financial year. At the end of March 2010 a total of £95M was left unpaid for rating assessments raised during the 2009/10 financial year.

A5 Project

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the level of funding the Executive has allocated to the A5 project; and (ii) whether he can confirm that if the project is scrapped, given that the Irish Government has postponed its contribution to the project, the funds due to be spent in the North West will still be available for infrastructure projects in the North West.
(AQW 4296/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The spending profile of the A5 project is a matter for the DRD Minister to address. With regard to how the funds allocated to the A5 will now be used, the Executive is currently considering the implications of the RoI decision to defer payment and how these funds can be re-allocated.

Special Advisers: Revised Code of Practice on the Appointment of

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the revised Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers will be published.
(AQW 4297/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A revised Code of Practice is being prepared and will be issued to departments in due course. At that point I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Assembly library.

Social Clauses

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to what extent social clauses are being applied as conditions of procurement by the Central Procurement Directorate.
(AQW 4372/11-15)

Mr Wilson: All procurement contracts awarded by Central Procurement Directorate include standard clauses requiring compliance with all applicable fair employment, equality of treatment, anti-discrimination and health & safety legislation.

For construction related contracts contractual obligations routinely include the provision of work opportunities for the unemployed, apprentices and students on construction related courses.

For supplies and services contracts the scope for including employment obligations is more limited as these contracts typically have a lower value. However they are applied where the scope exists.

VAT Rates and Regulations for Take-away Food

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he intends to make any representations to the Treasury in relation to the differences in VAT rates and regulations for take-away food in Northern Ireland compare to the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 4391/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rate of Value Added Tax (VAT) is a Reserved Matter for HM Treasury to determine. In announcing the increase in the standard rate of VAT to 20 per cent in Budget 2010, the Chancellor indicated that this was one of a series of measures to tackle the deficit.

In general, cold take away food is zero rated in both jurisdictions while a 9% reduced rate is applied to hot take away food in the Republic of Ireland compared to the standard rate of 20% which is applied to hot take away food in the UK.

There are no indications that the Government would be willing to consider reducing VAT on hot take away food to make it comparable with the rate in the Republic of Ireland. Therefore I have not had, nor do I intend to have any discussions with the Treasury in this regard.

VAT in the Republic of Ireland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he intends to make representations to the Treasury in relation to companies that trade in Northern Ireland, but are registered for VAT in the Republic of Ireland, and pay VAT on profits at Republic of Ireland rates.
(AQW 4400/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Value Added Tax (VAT) is not chargeable on profits. It is a tax that is charged on most goods and services that VAT-registered businesses provide in the UK. It is also charged on goods and some services that are imported from countries outside the European Union (EU), and brought into the UK from other EU countries, including the Republic of Ireland.

The rules governing VAT registration and its payment are very detailed and cover many eventualities. The specific requirements in each instance depend on a number of factors, principally whether the trade is a supply of a good or service, the nature of that good or service and where that supply actually takes place.

Determining compliance with, and enforcement of these requirements is a matter for HM Customs and Revenue and therefore I do not intend raising this matter with the Treasury. Any specific concerns in this regard should be referred to HMRC together with the appropriate evidence.

British Government's £500 million Growing Places Fund

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the £50 million allocated to the devolved administrations from the British Government's £500 million Growing Places Fund (i) how much will be allocated to projects in Northern Ireland; (ii) how he will ensure that the relevant businesses and entrepreneurs receive the funding in a timely manner; and (iii) to outline the application process.

(AQW 4416/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Communities and Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles and the Transport Secretary Justine Greening announced the details of the Growing Places Fund on 7th November 2011.

Of the £500million announced, £250 million is expenditure that is currently within existing budgets in England. However £250 million has been provided to the fund from the Treasury Reserve. As a consequence of this, the Northern Ireland Executive received £7,039,000 in additional capital expenditure funding for 2011-12, through the Barnett Formula.

However, any and all allocations received from the Barnett Formula are unhypothecated, that is to say that it is for the Executive to determine how best to deploy these funds in accordance with local needs and priorities.

The additional funding arising from this Barnett consequential will be included in the overall funding position considered by the Executive as part of the 2011-12 January Monitoring round.

Steps to Work Programme

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his response to the Department for Employment and Learning's October Monitoring Round bid for an additional £9.2 million for the Steps to Work Programme, and an additional £3 million for the Step Ahead Programme to meet the demands being placed on these programmes as a result of rising unemployment.

(AQW 4418/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I was pleased that the Executive agreed to the allocation of an additional £5 million to the Department for Employment and Learning at the October Monitoring Round for the Steps to Work Programme, which will go some considerable way to addressing the increased demand on the Programme. I had concerns based on the information provided to my Department by the Department for Employment and Learning that the additional £3 million sought for the Step Ahead Programme would not be

spent in this financial year, and given the competition for limited resources regrettably this bid could not be supported.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses have benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme to date, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4455/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of non-domestic properties in each constituency that have benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only. The latest figures available, as at 13th November 2011, indicate that a total of 23,789 non-domestic premises have benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme. The table overleaf indicates the number of properties in each District Council area that have benefited.

District Council Area	Number of Properties at 13th November 2011 that have received SBRR
Antrim	613
Ards	1,076
Armagh	984
Ballymena	994
Ballymoney	476
Banbridge	650
Belfast	3,384

District Council Area	Number of Properties at 13th November 2011 that have received SBRR
Carrickfergus	399
Castlereagh	389
Coleraine	947
Cookstown	566
Craigavon	1,223
Derry	1,211
Down	1,054
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	1,004
Fermanagh	1,274
Larne	536
Limavady	461
Lisburn	1,101
Magherafelt	780
Moyle	467
Newry & Mourne	1,372
Newtownabbey	763
North Down	707
Omagh	783
Strabane	575
Total	23,789

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Ilex Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with regard to the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4246/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Ilex Plan identifies a number of priorities for Health, and Health and Social Care (HSC) Agencies have been closely involved in the Plan's development and are supportive of it.

The priorities that have been identified for health and social care are consistent with HSC priorities. Although not necessarily directly funded under the Ilex Plan, there are a wide range of projects, some of which have already been in place, which contribute to agreed priorities including:

- pilot Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme for which £350k per annum has been allocated
- Family Support Hubs (Early Intervention Family Support Partnerships) - £420k has been allocated to these Partnerships
- Surestart schemes in the Council area in Edinballymore (£534,517), Shantallow (£669,510) and Waterside (£424,933).

In addition the PHA are funding projects/ programmes in the Derry City Council amounting to an investment of £527,177. These are contributing to the following priority areas for action -

- Alcohol Culture - £124,000
- Sustainable Communities - £224,377
- Obesity - £56,500
- Mental Health/emotional wellbeing - £114,000 (£50k subject to approval)
- Promoting active ageing - £8,300.00

Derry also benefits from a number of programmes which are delivered more widely or regionally.

It is also notable that a number of CAWT projects are in place which relate to the Ilex agenda and consideration is being given to how these may be mainstreamed if they prove successful.

Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all the current public contracts within his Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender.

(AQW 4255/11-15)

Mr Poots: Public contracts within the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) fall into three broad categories:

- i those orders placed under 'centralised frameworks' drawn up and managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate (CPD);
- ii. those specifically tendered for DHSSPS purposes; and
- iii. those pre-RPA contracts entered into by the Department when, through its Directorate of Information Systems, it had responsibility for IT systems in the health and social care sector.

The first category covers such consumables as stationery and ICT supplies, software support, catering and other ancillary supplies. As noted above, the base contracts are let by CPD; the Department simply 'calls off' an order as and when needed. The information requested is not, therefore, held by DHSSPS.

The second category essentially comprises administrative support and management consultancy, as follows.

Name of Contract	Awarded to	How Advertised	Renewal/Expiry Date
To review the transfer of prison healthcare	Cogent Management Consulting LLP	Tendered through CPD and advertised through their website	Not to be renewed
Media Monitoring and Evaluation	Kantar	Through Executive Information Service at OFMdFM on behalf all departments	Due for renewal in 2012 with an option for three more years
Asset/Property management system for buildings in the Health Estate	Oakleaf 3i	OJEU contract notice	To be re-tendered in May 2013
Obtaining Planning Permission for Downe Hospital Site	BDP	OJEU by CoPE Health Estates	March 2012 – not to be renewed
Obtaining Planning Permission for Belvoir Park Hospital Site	Drivers Jonas	OJEU by CoPE Health Estates	December 2011 – Not to be renewed
External Panel to the Review of HSC in Northern Ireland	5 Independent experts	STA	12 week duration – not to be renewed
Storage and distribution services for ambient pandemic or emergency pharmaceuticals	An exemption under Section 38 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has been applied.	OJEU	2015/16
Finance, Procurement and Logistics system for the HSC Shared Services project within the HSC Business Services Transformation Project	Advanced Business Solutions	In compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (Amended) which implement the EU Public Sector Procurement Directive (2004/18/EC)	October 2021
Human Resources, Payroll and Travel and Subsistence system for the HSC Shared Services project within the HSC Business Services Transformation Project	AXON	In compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (Amended) which implement the EU Public Sector Procurement Directive (2004/18/EC)	October 2021
An evaluation of the Suicide Prevention Strategy	Moore Stephen	Tendered through CPD – open to all suppliers	31 May 2012
Strategic Adviser to BSTP	Grant Thornton	Tendered through CPD – open to all suppliers	31 March 2012
IT for oral hearings of the Hyponatraemia Enquiry	Wordwave International	Tendered through CPD – EU Open	31 December 2012

Name of Contract	Awarded to	How Advertised	Renewal/Expiry Date
IT for oral hearings of the Hyponatraemia Enquiry	Wordwave International	Tendered through CPD – EU Open	31 December 2012
IT for oral hearings of the Hyponatraemia Enquiry	Internet Videocommunications	Tendered through CPD – EU Open	31 December 2012

The third category is the largest, both as regards number of contracts and value. All were procured in compliance with the public procurement requirements in force at the time eg notices, where applicable, in the Official Journal of the EU (or, for the older contracts, the Official Journal of the EC) and compliance with the principles of transparency and fair competition. The other details requested are shown in the table below

Name of Contract	Awarded to	Renewal/Expiry date
Development & Run Time Licences +support for Acucobol	Acucorp/Micro Focus	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Technical Support and Software Upgrade Agreement for ACE appliances.	BSS	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Regional theatre management system	BT	02/10/12
Licence Agreement -Paint Shop Pro & Animation Shop 3	Digital Workshop	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Provision of legal services in support of Northern Ireland Health & Social Care	DLA Piper UK LLP	24/10/2012
Provision of legal services in support of Northern Ireland Health & Social Care	DLA Piper UK LLP	24/10/2012
NI Child Health System	NI Child Health System	31/12/2011
Unidata	IBM - Unidata (ex Informix)	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Lotus Passport Programme	Lotus	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Facilities Management services	Fujitsu (ex ICL/CFM)	31/03/2013
EPES	HP	28/07/2014
Licence Agreement - Exceed	Hummingbird	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Unidata	IBM - Unidata (ex Informix)	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Lotus Passport Programme	Lotus	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Microsoft Services premier support	MICROSOFT	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Escrow agreement	NCC/Issoft	Expected termination 31/10/2015
Conductor32 Licence supply and support	ndl - metascybe	31/03/2012
Third Party Maintenance (peripherals & Data Comms)	Northgate IS (ex SX3/Aurora)	30/09/2012
Licence supply and support	Oracle	Software maintenance - paid each year while product in use
Software Support (FPS Dental, Pharmaceutical, BACS)	Parity	31/03/2014
HSC Payroll Support	Parity	07/09/2013
Business Object Maintenance Support and Renewal for Business Objects Enterprise Premium (regional licence)	SAP	31/10/2012
HostAccess Licence Supply and Support	Quovadx	Extended to 30/11/2011 and will be further extended
NIPACS	Sectra Ltd	29/09/2018
e-intranet software licence and support	Serengeti	31/01/2012

HostAccess Licence Supply and Support	Quovadx	Extended to 30/11/2011 and will be further extended
IBM Hardware Maintenance Agreement	ServiceSuite	30/06/2013
Licence Agreement-Sophos	Sophos	31/03/2015
Supply/support infrastructural and managed services	Steria	Contractor may terminate without cause on or after 31/07/2013
Licence supply and support	Texthelp Systems Ltd	01/06/2012
Licence supply and support	Texthelp Systems Ltd	01/06/2012
Systems Supply (PAS)	Torex isoft (ex SMS)	31/10/2015
Software Support (PAS)	Torex isoft (ex SMS)	31/10/2015

Acute Stroke Patients

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last five years, to detail the percentage of acute stroke patients who were admitted directly to a Stroke Unit, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust area. **(AQW 4263/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Where possible the table below details the percentage of acute stroke patients admitted directly to a Stroke Unit in each of the last five years.

Health and Social Care Trust	% of patients admitted directly to a Stroke Unit				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast	50%	47%	42%	42%	43%
Northern	26%	29%	31%	33%	36%
South Eastern	*	*	*	24%	42%
Southern	*	*	*	*	*
Western	37%	35%	35%	42%	32%

* Information for South Eastern Trust is not available for years before 2009/10 as patients were usually admitted to an assessment ward before being transferred to a stroke unit.

* Southern Trust are not able to provide this information as it has only started to be collated from April 2011.

Homelessness Organisations: Funding

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the names of all homelessness projects funded by the Western Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the level of funding (a) applied for; (b) granted to each project; and (iii) the total amount of funding allocated to homelessness organisations. **(AQW 4282/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The table below details the funding provided in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area by HSC bodies for homelessness projects during 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Homelessness Organisation	2010/11	2009/10	Funding Provider
Damien House	£73,027	£155,004	Western HSCT
Ramona House	£102,232	£103,863	Western HSCT
House in the Wells	£15,026	£15,266	Western HSCT
Methodist City Missions.	£71,719	£72,863	Western HSCT
Foyle Haven	£99,000	£96,176	Public Health Agency
Solace-Arch Healthy	£86,000	£83,933	Public Health Agency
First Housing Aid and Support Services	£19,500	£11,987	Public Health Agency
Fermanagh New Horizons	£34,000	£33,620	Public Health Agency
NIHE in association with the Health & Social Care Board	£260,000	£260,000	Health & Social Care Board
Total Funding	£760,504	£832,712	

Details of funding for 2008/09 can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

All homelessness projects funded by the Western Health and Social Care Trust have contracts or service level agreements in place for the provision of services. The contract values are agreed and reviewed annually and in that context, funding is not applied for.

£2,316,959 was allocated to homelessness organisations across Northern Ireland in 2009/10 and £2,254,311 was allocated in 2010/11. Details of funding for 2008/09 can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Speech and Language Therapy Graduates

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to assist speech and language therapy graduates in finding employment.

(AQW 4304/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of student places commissioned by my Department each year reflects both the current and projected level of demand for newly qualified speech and language therapists. In this way the commissioning process aims to achieve a balance in supply and demand to ensure employment opportunity for the newly qualified. The commissioned number of places in 2011/12 is 30 and the overall vacancy headcount at 31 March 2011 for speech and language therapists is 10.

My Department carries out regular workforce reviews for each clinical professional group, including speech and language therapy. These reviews inform decision-making on issues impacting on workforce supply and demand.

Medical Reports of Young Children

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether it is protocol to withhold medical reports of young children from their parents; and if so, to explain the reasons.

(AQW 4312/11-15)

Mr Poots: The protocols on parental access to the medical records of their children are contained in the General Medical Council ethical guidance "0-18 years" and underpinned by the provisions of the Access to Health Records (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

Alternative Therapies Scheme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to introduce the Alternative Therapies Scheme provided by Get Well NI, which was piloted in GP practices in Belfast and Derry in 2008.

(AQW 4315/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand the Complementary and Alternate Medicines (CAM) Pilot Project in 2007/2008 received very positive support from patient recipients. Since taking up my role as Health Minister I have been faced with taking many difficult decisions and in the light of the constrained budgetary environment I need to focus my resources on sustaining existing frontline health and social care services. As a result it is not possible to allocate any funding for CAM services during the current spending period.

Construction Work: Invoices

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4333/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department makes no payments in connection with construction work since it has no contracts for construction works and the Department is not aware of any issues in connection with the timeliness of payment for construction work.

The six Health and Social Care Trusts and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service were asked to provide information with regard to the proportion of invoices for construction work that have been paid on time in each of the last three years. These bodies have indicated that this information is not held in a form that permits ready access and that it would require significant resources to carry out a manual exercise to separately identify invoices for construction work from all other invoices so as to report on the proportion that have been paid on time in the past three years.

In light of this query my Department will write to the six Health and Social Care Trusts and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and ask if they have received any formal complaints, or are aware of any issues, in connection with the timeliness of payment for construction work.

Graduate Psychologists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the level of funding allocated to train graduate psychologists; (ii) how many graduate psychologists have applied for (a) training posts; and (b) permanent posts; and (iii) how many graduates have been successful in being awarded a permanent post, broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 4342/11-15)

Mr Poots: Recruitment data is generally available for the last 3 years only. Prior to this, Trusts operated in "legacy" recruitment teams in line with the former Trusts, and co-ordinated information from this period is not readily available.

The Department currently spends £1.5 million per year in funding 13 places on the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology course at Queens University Belfast. Prospective students must hold a 2.1 degree in Psychology to be considered for a place.

Data on the number of applications for posts and those awarded to psychology graduates is not collected and hence is not available.

Final Salary Pension Scheme

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many health professionals (i) have been; and (ii) will be affected by (a) recent; and (b) future pension changes to the final salary pension scheme.

(AQW 4359/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department is currently consulting on proposed changes to member contribution rates for the HSC Pension Scheme and no decisions will be taken on the detail of changes to the Scheme until the result of the consultation has been considered.

Retired Health Service Workers: Pensions

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average pension paid to retired health service workers.

(AQW 4360/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average pension paid to retired health service workers is £7 900 per annum

Public Sector Unions: Discussions

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any discussions he has had with public sector unions to date.

(AQW 4361/11-15)

Mr Poots: I met with TUS Joint Secretaries shortly after taking up office and since then I have had a number of further meetings including a meeting with the partnership forum which is made up of TUS, Departmental Officials and Health Service Management. I have also met with Unison on 15 September and on Monday last I met with representatives from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. I have told TUS that my door is always open and I am happy to talk with them anytime.

Cardiac Surgical Operations

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current cost to the Health Service of cardiac surgical operations being carried on patients resident in Northern Ireland who have surgery in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; and (iii) Great Britain.

(AQW 4368/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest available costs of cardiac surgical operations for patients resident in Northern Ireland are as follows;

- i) The 2009-10 cost for patients who have surgery in Northern Ireland is £17.2m.
- ii) The 2010-11 cost for patients who have surgery in the Republic of Ireland is £3m.
- iii) The 2010-11 cost for patients who have surgery in Great Britain is £0.7m.

Cardiac Surgical Operations

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost to the Health Service of a cardiac surgical operation, including patient and family travel and accommodation, for patients resident in Northern Ireland who have surgery in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; and (iii) Great Britain.

(AQW 4369/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest available average unit costs of cardiac surgical operations, including patient and family travel and accommodation, for patients resident in Northern Ireland are as follows;

- i) The 2009-10 average unit cost for patients treated in Northern Ireland is £18,924.
- ii) The 2010-11 average unit cost for patients treated in the Republic of Ireland is £18,750.
- iii) The 2010-11 average unit cost for patients treated in Great Britain is £14,200.

Paediatrics Departments

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many consultants work at each hospital's paediatrics department; and what is the average daily number of patients they treat.

(AQW 4376/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of consultants working in paediatric departments by hospital is not centrally available from DHSSPS as staff may work across hospital sites and may provide both hospital and community services. Therefore the total number of consultants recorded as working in paediatric hospital and community services (excluding mental health) by HSC Trust is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Consultants within Paediatrics Services (excluding mental health) at 30th September 2010

HSC Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	36	33.21
Northern	15	13.95
South Eastern	10	9.25
Southern	14	13.4
Western	15	14.7

Source: Human Resource Management System

Notes:

1 Figures exclude staff with a whole-time equivalent (WTE) less than or equal to 0.03 and staff on career breaks.

Information is not collected centrally on all contacts a patient may have with a paediatric consultant. We are, however, able to provide information on the number of inpatient admissions and outpatient attendances within a paediatric specialty. These are provided in the form of average daily numbers in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Average Daily Number of Inpatient Admissions to Paediatric Specialties during 2010/11

Hospital	Average Daily Number of Admissions
Altnagelvin	9.5
Antrim	8.6
Causeway	4.0
Craigavon	7.1
Daisy Hill	4.3
Erne	5.2
Lagan Valley	0.1
Mid Ulster	0
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	12.5
Royal Maternity	1.2
Royal Victoria	0
Tyrone County	0
Ulster	12.5

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Notes:

1 Paediatric Specialties have been defined as (142) Paediatric Dentistry, (171) Paediatric Surgery, (420) Paediatrics and (421) Paediatric Neurology.

2 It must be noted that the data presented in Tables 2 and 3 will not represent all patients that will come into contact with a paediatric consultant.

Table 3: Average Daily Outpatient Attendances (Seen - New and Review) during 2010/11 - Paediatric Specialties

HSC Hospital	Average Daily Number of Attendances
Belfast City	0.2
Ards	2.7
Ulster	20.1
Royal Victoria	0.0
Royal Maternity	2.9
RBHSC	55.8
Muckamore Abbey	7.1
Lagan Valley	0.9
Downe	1.0
Causeway Hospital	11.5
Moyle	1.9
Whiteabbey	1.0

HSC Hospital	Average Daily Number of Attendances
Mid Ulster	3.6
Antrim	15.3
Waveney	2.6
Armagh Community	5.2
South Tyrone	3.3
Banbridge	1.4
Lurgan	0.2
Craigavon Area	11.5
Daisy Hill	8.9
Bluestone (formerly Craigavon Area PNU)	0.8
Altnagelvin Area	20.4
Roe Valley (Outpatients)	0.4
Gransha	1.9
Erne	7.9
Tyrone County	5.7

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR)

Notes:

3 Paediatric Specialties have been defined as (142) Paediatric Dentistry, (171) Paediatric Surgery, (420) Paediatrics and (421) Paediatric Neurology.

4 It must be noted that the data presented in Tables 2 and 3 will not represent all patients that will come into contact with a paediatric consultant.

Kinship Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the agreed definitions used by Social Services for Kinship Care arrangements, broken down (i) by Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4384/11-15)

Mr Poots: The agreed definition of kinship care is that set out in the guidance, Definitions of private family arrangements, private fostering and kinship foster care, which was issued by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board to all HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland in 2009. The guidance stipulates that kinship foster carers are 'relatives', as defined by Article 2 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order (1995), or friends of looked after children. The guidance also directs Trusts that the full looked after children's provisions in listed Regulations apply to children, who are cared for under kinship arrangements. The listed Regulations are The Foster Placement Regulations 1996; The Arrangements for the Placement of Children Regulations 1996; The Review of Children's Cases Regulations; The Representation Procedures Regulation 1996; and The Children (Leaving Care) Regulations 2005.

Kinship Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research his Department has carried out to assess the benefits of a child being placed with a Kinship carer as opposed to a child being placed in care.

(AQW 4403/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not carried out any comparative research in this area.

Musgrave Park Hospital: Orthopaedic Consultation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what procedure is followed at Musgrave Park Hospital when a GP refers a patient for an urgent orthopaedic consultation; (ii) what staff grade determines the priority in relation to the allocation of an appointment; and (iii) can the appointment priority status, as stated in the original GP referral, be downgraded.

(AQW 4420/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) & (ii) GP referrals to Musgrave Park Hospital are triaged by a senior nursing team; the senior nursing team also determines the priority in relation to the allocation of an appointment.
- (ii) The priority status of a referral can be downgraded; however, if there are any queries regarding this they are then passed to a Consultant. Decisions are based on clinical judgment and patients with the same clinical need are treated in chronological order on grounds of fairness, and to minimise the waiting time for all patients.

Kinship Carers

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support, financial or otherwise, is available from his Department or the Health and Social Care Trusts for Kinship carers.

(AQW 4429/11-15)

Mr Poots: From the time the child is placed by social services carers, both kinship (family/friends) and non-kinship (stranger) foster carers, are paid the same allowances. The allowances from 1 April 2011 are detailed below. Some children may be entitled to enhanced allowances if they have particular needs and these are determined by individual assessment. All approved foster carers, kinship and non-kinship, are provided with a link worker support whose role is to support and advocate for the foster carer so that the needs of the child in placement can be fully met. In addition, the placing Trust provides a training programme delivered by a Senior Practitioner to meet specific assessed needs. Kinship and non-kinship foster carers also receive support from the organisation, Fostering Achievement, to meet the identified educational needs of the child and to facilitate participation in sport and other activities to promote the child's self-esteem and self-confidence. These additional supports have proved vital to those caring for children with additional needs.

Age Group	Per Week	Per 4 Weeks	Per Annum
0-4	£114.03	£456.12	£5929.56
5-10	£126.00	£504.00	£6552.00
11-15	£145.04	£580.16	£7542.08
16+	£168.00	£672.00	£8736.00

Foster Carers

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support, financial or otherwise, is available from his Department or the Health and Social Care Trusts for foster carers.

(AQW 4430/11-15)

Mr Poots: From the time the child is placed by social services carers, both kinship (family/friends) and non-kinship (stranger) foster carers, are paid the same allowances. The allowances from 1 April 2011 are detailed below. Some children may be entitled to enhanced allowances if they have particular needs and these are determined by individual assessment. All approved foster carers, kinship and non-kinship, are provided with a link worker support whose role is to support and advocate for the foster carer so that the needs of the child in placement can be fully met. In addition, the placing Trust provides a training programme delivered by a Senior Practitioner to meet specific assessed needs. Kinship and non-kinship foster carers also receive support from the organisation, Fostering Achievement, to meet the identified educational needs of the child and to facilitate participation in sport and other activities to promote the child's self-esteem and self-confidence. These additional supports have proved vital to those caring for children with additional needs.

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16+	£168.00	£672.00	£8736.00

Children in Informal Kinship Care

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to provide health and dental care for children in informal Kinship Care.

(AQW 4468/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under Article 2 of the Health and Social Care Reform Act (NI) 2009 my Department is required to provide, or secure the provision of, health and social care to all persons in Northern Ireland, which by default extends to those in informal kinship care.

Kinship Care

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to introduce a Kinship Care policy.

(AQW 4469/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no plans to introduce a specific kinship care policy at this stage. However, it is intended to introduce standards and guidance for kinship foster carers early in 2012.

Foster Carers from the Travelling Community

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in order to preserve cultural identity, how many registered foster carers come from the Travelling Community.

(AQW 4526/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts are encouraged to recruit foster carers from the communities from which children enter the care system. There is a duty under Article 18 (b) and Schedule 2 of The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, where it is in keeping with the child's best interests, to endeavour to place children within their family or wider family circle.

Registered foster carers from the Travelling Community

Trust	Registered Foster Carers from Travelling Community
Northern	Nil
Southern	Nil
South Eastern	1
Belfast	Nil
Western	Nil

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

Accident and Emergency Units

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the number of patients admitted to Accident and Emergency Units, particularly at weekends, as a direct result of alcohol consumption and the type of their injuries and illnesses (i) impacts detrimentally on staff and other patients; and (ii) is the cause of verbal and physical assaults on staff.

(AQW 4527/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not readily available in this format and can only be made available at a disproportionate cost. The current monitoring process under the Department's Zero Tolerance policy records the number of incidents at trust level relating to physical and verbal attacks against HSC staff by staff groups and location of the attack. For the year 2010/11 the total number of recorded incidents of physical and verbal abuse against HSC staff was 8136 – of which 330 (4.1%) occurred in Accident and Emergency Units.

Alcohol consumption of persons attending A&E units, particularly those who accompany patients, can often result in nuisance and disturbance behaviour which affects both staff and patients. To address this issue the Department has recently introduced clauses to the Criminal Justice and Immigration (CJI) Act 2008, which makes it an offence to cause nuisance or disturbance on HSC Premises.

The Act gives 'Authorised Officers' within HSC Trusts the 'power of removal' of persons causing disturbance, using reasonable force if necessary. These new powers enable HSC staff to deal with this behaviour before it escalates to more serious incidents, which will help ensure that hospitals are safer for both staff and patients.

Procedures for Carrying out an MSSU and Throat Swab

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the procedures for carrying out an (i) MSSU; and (ii) throat swab in the (a) Tyrone County Hospital; and (b) the Omagh Health Centre; and (iii) what is the timescale for the results in each.

(AQW 4590/11-15)

Mr Poots: An MSSU test, as the name suggests, requires the patient to collect a small sample of urine from mid-stream. A throat swab is taken by the doctor or nurse rubbing a small cotton swab on a stick over the back of the throat.

All specimens including MSSUs and throat swabs are sent to the Microbiology Laboratory in Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Collection times from Omagh Health Centre are: 11:00 a.m., 12 noon, 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. Specimens are collected and taken to the laboratory reception area in Tyrone County Hospital. These specimens along with specimens from the Tyrone County Hospital are forwarded to Altnagelvin at 10:00 a.m. and 2:45 p.m. to arrive in Altnagelvin at approximately 11:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. respectively. Specimens are processed on the day of arrival. This arrangement applies from Monday to Friday only.

Results for both MSSUs and throat swabs are normally available within three days.

The turnaround time is influenced by the type of specimen and the need for further confirmatory tests.

Assembly Questions: Costs

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4599/11-15)

Mr Poots: DHSSPS does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and the information requested is therefore not available.

Organ Donation: Opt-Out System

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to creating an opt-out system for organ donation.

(AQW 4602/11-15)

Mr Poots: Organ donation is an issue I have a particular interest in and I am currently exploring all options for increasing organ donation, including the introduction of an opt-out system.

I am aware that Wales has issued a White Paper consultation on the possible introduction of an opt-out system of organ donation for Wales; I will wish to consider the documentation and look forward to hearing the outcome of the consultation in due course.

In the meantime, my officials will continue to work closely with colleagues in the other UK countries to increase the number of donated organs.

Munby Judgement: 2001

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures, including financial provision, have been put in place to ensure that Social Services adhere to the terms of the 2001 Munby Judgement, broken down (i) by Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4607/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board has indicated that while there are no direct measures in place in terms of monitoring, all five Health and Social Care Trusts have indicated that they are compliant with the Munby judgement. Kinship foster carers are also members of Fostering Network which provides an independent voice for carers and a mechanism to raise issues and concerns.

Specific funding has not been allocated to enforce the Munby judgement in the last three years, rather Trusts are required to deliver all their legislative responsibilities from within their overall financial envelope.

Kinship Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what research has been funded by his Department into Kinship Care arrangements; and (ii) what plans, including financial provision, are in place to research such arrangements in the 2012/13 financial year, broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 4612/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been no research funded by my Department into kinship care arrangements and there are no plans at this stage to research such arrangements in 2012/13 financial year.

Kinship Care Arrangements

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the policy documents that have been drafted, approved and promulgated, by each Health and Social Care Trust, to inform staff of the circumstances in which Kinship Care arrangements are to be considered and what practices and procedures are to be adopted in such circumstances.

(AQW 4616/11-15)

Mr Poots: Policy documents, which have been drafted, approved and promulgated by all HSC Trusts to inform staff of the circumstances in which kinship care arrangements should be considered include: Children Order Regulations and Guidance, Volume 3 'Family Placement and Private Fostering' ;Handbook of Policy and Procedures, Volume 2 'Children Looked After'.

Also, all staff attend training in established practice and procedure and have full access to, and knowledge of, published documents.

Finally, staff will be made aware of the Kinship Care Standards and Guidance, which are due for publication and circulation in early 2012.

Agenda for Change

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the Health and Social Care Board and the Health and Social Care Trusts have reviewed and examined the Agenda for Change; and if so, (ii) what were the outcomes and problems identified; and (iii) what action he intends to take to address them.

(AQW 4622/11-15)

Mr Poots: Agenda for Change is being implemented by employers in partnership with Trade Unions. Whenever the implementation process is fully completed, a Pay Audit of Agenda for Change across all HSC employers will be undertaken, again in partnership with Trade Unions.

Bullying Cases Amongst Staff

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of bullying cases amongst staff reported in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in each year since 2007; and of these, how many related to sectarian harassment.

(AQW 4623/11-15)

Mr Poots: The details of reported formal cases of bullying at the Belfast HSC Trusts are set out in the table below. Information before 2009 is not readily available and informal cases are dealt with by line management.

Year	Number of Bullying cases	Number that were sectarian related
2009	6	0
2010	15	0
2011	14	1

Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry: Second Operating Theatre

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made towards the provision of a second operating theatre at the Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry.

(AQW 4646/11-15)

Mr Poots: In January 2010, the Southern Trust submitted a Strategic Outline Case in support of redevelopment of the Daisy Hill site which included provision of additional paediatric theatre capacity.

The Trust has recently met with Departmental officials to discuss theatre requirements and an indication of possible funding to support leasing of temporary theatre capacity in DHH from Cooperation and Working Together, a joint North/South initiative. However, initial analysis has concluded that this option would not represent value for money.

The Trust has been asked to prepare a business case specifically for the provision of additional theatre capacity to be funded from the Department's capital budget. The case for investment will of course need to take account of the service reconfiguration recommendations arising from the HSC Review,

Subject to consideration and approval of a robust business case for this investment, and taking account of other urgent priorities, I will consider making budgetary cover available to support this investment.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on (i) the treatment of; and (ii) research on Myalgic Encephalomyelitis in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4650/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information is not available for the cost of specific treatment for people living with ME. Patients suffering from ME are treated, for the most part, by their general practitioners; however, patients (both adults and children) have access to a wide range of care and support services in primary, secondary and community settings, including specialist medical, paediatric, neurology and mental health services in common with other patients.
- (ii) My Department has made no research funding available in the last five years for ME.

Capital Works Projects

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how much his Department spent on capital works projects; and (ii) of this, how much was paid to building contractors, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4658/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not make any payments in relation to capital works. I provide capital allocations to HSC Trusts and other Arms Length Bodies within my departmental remit who are then responsible for making payments. The 6 Health and Social Care Trusts and the NIFRS have advised in response to a similar Assembly Question that the information required to answer your question is not held in a form that permits ready access and that it would require significant resources to carry out a manual exercise to separately identify construction work from all other invoices.

However, it is estimated that approximately £500m has been spent in the past 3 years on capital works of which almost £400m was paid to building contractors.

Injuries Resulting from Fireworks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of injuries resulting from fireworks which were treated in hospital in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4694/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people reporting to Emergency Care with firework related injuries. This information is collected over a four week period covering the end of October and the start of November each year (Halloween period) and is available from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/firework-stats.htm

Information for the 2011 Halloween period is due to be published on Thursday 15th December 2011.

Business Services Organisation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Business Services Organisation and its proposed locations.

(AQW 4700/11-15)

Mr Poots: The location of shared services centres is an important aspect of the Business Services Transformation Programme which is being operationally led by the Business Services Organisation. I expect to consult on proposals for those locations in the near future”

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total cost of providing services to children in kinship care arrangements in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4862/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer to my response to AQW 4091/11-15.

The cost of providing services to children in kinship care arrangements in each of the last three years, by Health and Social Care Trust, can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Department of Justice

Republican Separated Prisoners Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that their original demands had been met, to outline the reasons for the Republican separated prisoners re-starting their protest.

(AQW 4025/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): It is not for me as Minister to speak for, or explain the actions of, prisoners.

Republican Separated Prisoners: Damage Caused

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total cost of the damage caused by Republican separated prisoners during their protest since it began on Easter Sunday 2010, including the cost of repairs, the replacement of damaged goods and the additional staff costs.

(AQW 4030/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total cost of the damage caused by republican separated prisoners during their protest, since it began on Easter Sunday 2010 is £1,007,000.

This includes the cost of repairs, the replacement of damaged goods and additional staff costs.

Prisoners

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what is the maximum number of prisoners that can be held in each prison.

(AQW 4032/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are a total of 2198 bed spaces currently available but this level of occupancy is constrained owing to the consequences of keeping various categories of prisoners in separate accommodation and the desirability of avoiding cell sharing where possible. This is broken down as follows:

■	Hydebank Wood	391
■	Magilligan	604
■	Maghaberry	1203

These figures include bed spaces available for use in exceptional circumstances such as coping with population fluctuations, which are located in the Special Supervision Units at Hydebank Wood and Magilligan, as well as bed spaces used more routinely in the Care and Supervision Unit and Healthcare Centre at Maghaberry.

Crimes against Older People

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what additional strategies his Department plans to pursue to combat crimes against older people.

(AQW 4034/11-15)

Mr Ford: The safety of older and vulnerable people and ensuring they can live their lives free from the fear of becoming a victim of crime is an important priority for my Department.

In Northern Ireland crimes against older people, especially violent crimes are relatively rare. Statistics show that people aged 65 or over are least likely to be the victims of violent crime, accounting for less than 2% of such victims last year though they constitute 14.5% of the population. However, I recognise that despite these statistics older and vulnerable people still have very real concerns about crime. My Department is developing a range of strategies to tackle crime and the fear of becoming a victim of crime amongst older and vulnerable people.

The new Community Safety Strategy, which will be published in early 2012, will help to build more confident communities and will include proposals to tackle fear of crime and provide reassurance to the most vulnerable. At local level the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships will be central to the delivery of initiatives to support older and vulnerable people in local communities, and build on existing successful initiatives at regional and local level such as community safety wardens, intergenerational projects and Neighbourhood Watch schemes to look out for elderly and vulnerable neighbours.

I have commissioned important work to develop a comprehensive Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending. The framework aims to reshape fundamentally our approach to tackling the factors leading people into the criminal justice system and the obstacles which hinder them from getting back out of it. This is a broad project, with far-reaching links across a number of Executive Departments. The target for the publication of the draft framework is March 2012. I will also launch a public consultation on victims and witnesses of crime next year. This strategy will apply to all victims, including older people.

These strategies will support the work of the wider justice agencies and Government in combating crimes against older and vulnerable people.

Crimes against Older People

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consideration is being given to the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences for people who commit crimes against older people.

(AQW 4035/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sentencing in the individual case is a matter for the judiciary, taking into account all the circumstances of the offence and any relevant mitigating or aggravating factors in a case. In making these decisions, judges are guided by sentencing guidelines, which indicate that the age and vulnerability of the victim should be treated as an aggravating factor in determining the appropriate sentence.

The Lord Chief Justice has recently announced a priority list of areas where sentencing guidance for the judiciary will be developed. The principles underlying sentencing, expressed in this guidance, will include attacks on vulnerable, including older, people, as an aggravating factor in sentencing decisions.

Alongside this work I have been considering a range of potential mechanisms by which greater transparency, consistency and understanding of sentencing practice might be achieved. I hope to announce proposals in the near future on how best these might be delivered in a way that will promote public confidence.

Republican Separated Prisoners' Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3777/11-15, to detail (i) the nature and extent of the damage caused to the cells on (a) 30 June 2011; and (b) 1 July 2011; (ii) the nature and extent of the fire damage to the recreation room on 1 July 2011; (iii) whether any prison staff were injured in these incidents; and (iv) how many prisoners have been charged in connection with each incident.

(AQW 4125/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) (a) On 30 June 2011 seven prisoners in republican separated accommodation caused damage to their cells, including sanitary ware and cell furniture to an extent that they were put beyond use.
- (b) On 1 July a further eight prisoners caused damage to their cells, including sanitary ware and cell furniture to an extent that they were put beyond use.
- (ii) The incident on 1 July also caused extensive fire damage to the dining hall/recreation room. This resulted in the area being no longer fit for use.
- (iii) No prison staff were injured in these incidents.
- (iv) Seven prisoners have been charged with criminal damage following the damage done to their cells on 30 June. Eight prisoners have been charged with criminal damage following the damage to their cells on 1 July. The fire damage on 1 July is subject to an ongoing police investigation.

Karen Walsh's Defence Teams

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) to detail the total cost to date in legal aid paid to each of Karen Walsh's defence teams throughout the course of her case; (ii) the costs paid to the expert consultants who gave evidence in her defence; and (iii) for an estimate of the final legal aid expenditure in this case.

(AQW 4129/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) To date the total sums paid to Karen Walsh's defence teams is £14,505.42. The breakdown is as follows:

■ Tiernans	£2,007.83 inc. VAT
■ McNamee, McDonnell & Duffy	£4,510.01 inc. VAT
■ Kevin Winters & Co	£7,024.08 inc. VAT
■ Higgins, Hollywood, & Deazle	£963.50 inc. VAT

The sums paid are in respect of the solicitors engaged in the Magistrates' Court phase of this case. To date no bills have been submitted by counsel for the Magistrates' Court stage. As the fees payable to counsel would not fall to be assessed as standard fees there is no basis on which to base an estimate of the likely cost.

(ii) To date no payments have been made in respect of expert consultants who gave evidence for the defence.

(iii) No projection of the total cost of the case can be provided at this time as the basis upon which the Crown Court case will be remunerated is dependent on the outcome of legal proceedings in a test case concerning the remuneration payable in respect of an unrelated Crown Court case.

Maghaberry Prison: Materials Purchased to Build Planters

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the cost of the materials purchased to build planters at Maghaberry Prison; (ii) the number of planters that have been made; and (iii) who authorised this (a) initiative; and (b) expenditure.

(AQW 4131/11-15)

Mr Ford: Maghaberry senior management are committed to improving the quality of the prison environment for all inmates. Garden planters are occasionally manufactured by prisoners as part of a vocational training programme that takes place in the Donard Gardens and then placed around the prison to improve environmental conditions for all who live and work there.

(i) The cost of the materials purchased to build planters at Maghaberry was £7579.39.

(ii) 35 planters have been made and placed around various parts of the prison.

(iii) a, b) The Governor gave approval for the planters to be made and for the expenditure incurred;

Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3782/11-15, how many items belonging to the Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum which are currently held at the Prison Service College (i) have been catalogued; and (ii) are yet to be catalogued.

(AQW 4176/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Approximately 6,000 items have been catalogued in the Prison Service Museum collection. (ii) There are an estimated 60,000 items yet to be catalogued.

The retired officer who was previously engaged by the Prison Service to catalogue the museum collection has offered to continue his work on a voluntary basis. This offer has been gratefully accepted. He has been, and will continue to be, assisted by a serving officer who is also a volunteer.

Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3782/11-15, what measures are in place to catalogue the artefacts and documents that are held at the Prison Service College while the future plans for the Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum are being formulated.

(AQW 4178/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Approximately 6,000 items have been catalogued in the Prison Service Museum collection. (ii) There are an estimated 60,000 items yet to be catalogued.

The retired officer who was previously engaged by the Prison Service to catalogue the museum collection has offered to continue his work on a voluntary basis. This offer has been gratefully accepted. He has been, and will continue to be, assisted by a serving officer who is also a volunteer.

Prisoners

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice, for the last available year, to detail the number of serving prisoners who have been convicted of (i) murder; (ii) manslaughter; and (iii) other serious violent offences and who have received legal aid for proceedings in family courts relating to (a) the adoption of children; (b) the residence of children; (c) contact with children; and (d) parental responsibility.

(AQW 4180/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not readily available.

My officials in the Prison Service produced reports detailing those sentenced for the above offences for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission grants legal aid for the above proceedings in family courts. The Commission attempted to cross-check the lists produced by the Prison Service with their records of prisoners granted legal aid in family proceedings. In the time available, the Commission was in a position to confirm that from 1 April 2010, seven prisoners sentenced for the above offences have been granted legal aid for the following proceedings:

- Five for contact proceedings;
- One for residence proceedings; and
- One for parental responsibility proceedings.

The information supplied by the Commission is by reference to primary case code.

Prisoners

Miss M McIlveen asked Minister of Justice, for the last available year, to detail the number of serving prisoners who have been convicted of (i) rape; (ii) sexual offences against adults; and (iii) sexual offences against children and who have received legal aid for proceedings in family courts relating to (a) the adoption of children; (b) the residence of children; (c) contact with children; and (d) parental responsibility.

(AQW 4181/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not readily available.

My officials in the Prison Service produced reports detailing those sentenced for the above offences for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission grants legal aid for the above proceedings in family courts. The Commission attempted to cross-check the lists produced by the Prison Service with their records of prisoners granted legal aid in family proceedings. In the time available, the Commission was in a position to confirm that from 1 April 2010, seven prisoners sentenced for the above offences have been granted legal aid for the following proceedings:

- Five for contact proceedings;
- One for residence proceedings; and
- One for parental responsibility proceedings.

The information supplied by the Commission is by reference to primary case code.

Robert Black

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3975/11-15, why the chartering of a private plane was deemed necessary; and who authorised this decision.

(AQW 4242/11-15)

Mr Ford: The arrangements were made, authorised and paid for by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

Released Prisoners

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to address the lack of engagement between people who have recently completed a prison sentence and their communities.

(AQW 4262/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DoJ) recognises that promoting positive engagement by offenders with their communities is a key factor in effective resettlement and rehabilitation. To this end, a multi agency resettlement agenda has been developed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), working in partnership with the wider DoJ; the Probation Board for Northern Ireland; and other partner agencies such as the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), to help offenders prepare for release, and to support them as they make the transition from custody to the community.

A wide range of programmes and practical support is available to prisoners to help address issues such as accommodation, debt, benefits, health, addictions, education/training, relationships, and family/parenting issues.

Dedicated multi-disciplinary offender management teams in each prison are responsible for ensuring that prisoners are referred, at an appropriate stage, to those interventions best suited to address their risk and needs, and to put in place the through-care arrangements that will help them to re-integrate into their communities, and support them to live crime-free lives.

The DoJ is alive to the fact that improving offenders' engagement with their communities cannot be delivered by the justice system alone; examples of innovative projects with the voluntary and community sector include an initiative between the women's prison at Hydebank Wood; the Probation-led Inspire Women's Project, NIACRO, and the Women's Support Network (WSN), which is designed to ensure that support and interventions provided to women, both within prison and after release, are co-ordinated with, and inclusive of, the network of support that already exists within the local communities to which the women are returning.

The initiative has allowed women to forge strong links with the wide range of services and support provided by the women's centres in their communities. In addition, representatives of the WSN provide one to one support to women, both in custody and, following their release, in the community.

Dungannon Crown Court: Case Number 10/040644

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the circumstances which led to the collapse of the first trial of case number 10/040644 at Dungannon Crown Court; and (ii) the total cost of the case.

(AQW 4317/11-15)

Mr Ford: The first trial in respect of case number 10/040644 did not collapse. The trial ran its full course but the jury was unable to reach a verdict.

Some of the costs associated with case number 10/040644 are not yet known and not all agencies hold cost information at case level. The figures set out in the table below should therefore be treated as estimated costs.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
PSNI Prosecution ¹	Not Known
PPS Prosecution	£32,500.00
Defence (Legal Aid Costs) ²	£2,645.56
Court (Judiciary, Staff and Jury Costs)	£25,036.76
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£1,395.00
Total	£61,577.32

1 PSNI have advised that due to the complexity of this investigation the costs associated with this case could only be calculated at disproportionate cost.

2 The proceedings in the Magistrates' Court have concluded, but, to date, no claim for payment has been received from the defendant's solicitor. The Crown Court proceedings are not yet concluded and accordingly no bills have been submitted for payment. This figure is the only known cost at this stage and is for advice given at the police station.

Maghaberry Prison, Roe House: Prison Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether any prison officers on duty in certain landings of Roe House, Maghaberry Prison, are in receipt of salary enhancements or additional payments; and if so, why this is deemed necessary.

(AQW 4319/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prison Officers on duty on Roe Three & Four landings in Maghaberry Prison are in receipt of an additional allowance. This allowance is paid to staff who are required to work in conditions where a dirty protest is taking place.

District Policing Partnerships

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the running costs of the District Policing Partnerships in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 4325/11-15)

Mr Ford: The District Policing Partnerships are sponsored by the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and funded jointly by NIPB and Councils. The total running costs of District Policing Partnerships in each of the last three financial years were:

2008/09

Total expenditure	£3.96 million
Funded by NIPB(75%)	£2.94 million

2009/10

Total expenditure	£3.89 million
Funded by NIPB(75%)	£2.88 million

2010/11

Total expenditure	£3.91 million
Funded by NIPB(75%)	£2.86 million

Judicial Office Holders

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of salaried Judicial Office Holders currently sitting; and (ii) the total cost of their salaries.

(AQW 4327/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have interpreted “judicial office holders” to include both court and tribunal judicial offices.

There are currently 80 salaried judicial office holders in post. Their total annual salary cost is £9,910,086 exclusive of Earnings Related National Insurance contributions (ERNI) and Accruing Superannuation Liability Charges (ASLC). The total estimated cost for 2011/12 is £14,286,403 including ERNI and ASLC.

Northern Ireland Prison Service Uniforms

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he can give an assurance that the crown will not be removed from Northern Ireland Prison Service uniforms.

(AQW 4348/11-15)

Mr Ford: No decisions have been taken in relation to Northern Ireland Prison Service uniforms. NIPS is undergoing fundamental end to end reform and this is one of a range of issues which I would expect to be considered as part of that ongoing review. Any proposals which are deemed to be controversial will be subject to approval by the Executive.

Her Majesty's Prison

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he can give an assurance that prisons will retain the name Her Majesty's Prison.

(AQW 4349/11-15)

Mr Ford: No decisions have been taken in relation to removing or retaining the name Her Majesty's Prison for prisons within Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is undergoing fundamental end to end reform and this is one of a range of issues which I would expect to be considered as part of that ongoing review. Any proposals which are deemed to be controversial will be subject to approval by the Executive.

Prisons: Hostages

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many hostage situations have taken place in each prison and the date each incident occurred, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4350/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been eight incidents of hostage taking in prisons in the last five years. Seven incidents occurred in Maghaberry Prison and one in Magilligan. All of the incidents involved a prisoner taking another prisoner hostage.

The dates of these incidents are set out below:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 to date
Maghaberry	0	0	1- 25/10/2009	1- 15/11/2009	1- 5/7/2011 1- 1/9/2011 1- 30/10/2011 1- 8/11/2011 1- 20/11/11
Magilligan	0	0	0	0	1- 10/10/2011

There have been no incidents of hostage taking in Hydebank Wood.

Prisons: Weapons Discovered

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last five years (i) the number and type of weapons discovered in each prison; and (ii) the date each weapon was discovered.

(AQW 4351/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the number and type of weapons discovered in each prison in each of the last five years and the date that each weapon was discovered.

Table A

Find Type	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood
Year 2006			
Improvised Blades/Knives	1 (Sep)	3 (Aug)	3 (Feb-May)
Flammable Items			2 (June)
Improvised Cosh			1 (Sep)
Year 2007			
Improvised Blades/Knives	7 (Jan – Nov)	3 (June/July)	2 (Feb/Dec)
Improvised Cosh			3 (Oct)
Year 2008			
Improvised Blades/knives		1 (July)	1 (March)
Improvised Cosh			2 (Mar/Aug)
Year 2009			
Improvised Blades/Knives	7 (Feb-Nov)	4 (Sep/Oct)	1 (July)
Improvised Cosh			2 (Apr/Nov)
Year 2010			
Improvised Blades/Knives	9 (Mar-Dec)	6 (Jan/Sept/Oct)	4 (Feb-Oct)
Improvised Cosh	1 (Mar)		
Total	25	17	21

Access to Justice Review: Consultation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what is the best way for members of the public to contribute to the ongoing consultation on the Access to Justice Review.

(AQW 4357/11-15)

Mr Ford: Representations to the consultation on the Access to Justice Review may be made in writing or by e-mail and should be addressed to:

Access to Justice Review
Public Legal Services Division
3rd Floor, Bedford House
Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7FD

Email – publiclegalservicesdivision@courtsni.gov.uk

My officials will also be happy to meet or speak to members of the public by telephone and are contactable on 028 9032 8594.

When I published the report, I encouraged elected representatives and the wider public to read it and to comment as part of the consultation. In addition, my Department has written to more than 450 individuals and organisations seeking their views. I would welcome any responses by 13 December 2011.

Maghaberry Prison Workshops

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether work in the Maghaberry Prison workshops was suspended to concentrate on making planters for the Prison.

(AQW 4392/11-15)

Mr Ford: No.

Prisoners Classified as Dissident Republicans

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners are currently classified as dissident republicans.

(AQW 4394/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison service does not classify prisoners in such a way. There are currently 34 male prisoners and 1 female prisoner in separated republican accommodation in Maghaberry.

Maghaberry Prison: Proposed Bowling Green

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) for the estimated cost of the proposed bowling green at Maghaberry Prison; (ii) why this project is considered necessary; (iii) who recommended the installation of a bowling green; (iv) when it is likely to be installed; and (v) how many prisoners are expected to avail of this facility.

(AQW 4402/11-15)

Mr Ford: No estimate has been made of the cost of for a bowling green.

Consideration has been given to a number of outline plans to help meet the recreational and vocational needs of the significant group of elderly inmates. Elderly inmates can experience mobility and disability problems. While some initial cultivation work has been carried out by inmates, the possible construction of a bowling green was rejected by the Governor in favour of more horticultural based activities.

Air Travel: Costs

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total cost incurred by his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4410/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice was established on 12 April 2010. From 12 April 2010 to 31 December 2010 the total cost incurred by the Department on air travel between (i) Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport is £41,759.27 and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain excluding Heathrow Airport is £32,540.59.

Separated Republican Prisoners Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of each piece of equipment, including search scanners, and transport, that was purchased in order to meet the demands of the separated republican prisoners' protest.

(AQW 4437/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the agreement of 12 August, six items of specialist detection equipment were purchased at a total cost of £54,593. For security reasons I do not propose to provide details of the equipment purchased.

Additional transport costs were requested by loyalist separated prisoners and costs are detailed in AQW 3265/11

Proceeds of Crime Applications

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Proceeds of Crime applications to retain seized goods or funds have been granted in each court division in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4440/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below details the number of Forfeiture Orders granted under Section 298 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in the Magistrates' Courts for each of the last three years broken down by County Court Division.

Table 1

Division Year	2008	2009	2010	Total
Antrim	14	22	35	71
Ards	13	10	4	27
Armagh and South Down	20	19	14	53
Belfast	45	48	22	115
Craigavon	21	12	20	53
Fermanagh and Tyrone	17	20	18	55
Londonderry	6	5	13	24
Total	136	136	126	398

Table 2 below details the number of Confiscation Orders made under Section 156 of the Act in the Crown Court for each of the last three years broken down by County Court Division.

Table 2

Division Year	2008	2009	2010	Total
Antrim	3	5	4	12
Ards	2	1	4	7
Armagh And South Down	22	9	8	39

Division Year	2008	2009	2010	Total
Belfast	19	7	16	42
Craigavon	2	8	4	14
Fermanagh And Tyrone	7	7	7	21
Londonderry	3	1	5	9
Total	58	38	48	144

Under Section 190 of the Act, an application for a Restraint Order may also be made to the Queens Bench Division of the High Court. Table 3 below sets out the number of Restraint Orders granted in the High Court for each of the last three years.

Table 3

Year	Orders Granted
2008	15
2009	12
2010	12
Total	39

Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3939/11-15, whether it is mandatory for an offender, who has been released on licence, to co-operate with the terms of the release to ensure public safety and that the necessary punishment for the crime committed is served.

(AQW 4441/11-15)

Mr Ford: Any offender who is released from prison on licence is required to co-operate with all the conditions of that licence. Failure to comply with any of its conditions can lead to the revocation of the licence and immediate return to custody.

Appointments to the Boards of the Agencies

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many appointments to the boards of the agencies, within his Department or its arm's-length bodies, have been made since June 2010; and how many of these appointments were made as the result of open competition.

(AQW 4445/11-15)

Mr Ford: A total of 34 appointments to the boards of agencies within the Department of Justice and its arm's length bodies has been made since June 2010. All were made as a result of open competition. The Department made one temporary appointment from 24 September 2010 to 31 January 2012. In addition the Department made seven re-appointments since June 2010, in accordance with relevant guidance and regulations.

Saintfield and Ballynahinch Police Stations: Capital Expenditure

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the capital expenditure at (i) Saintfield; and (ii) Ballynahinch police stations in each of the last five years, broken down by the category of expenditure.

(AQW 4462/11-15)

Mr Ford: The allocation of funding is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Fireworks Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many fireworks licences have been issued in each council area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4467/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice became responsible for issuing firework licences on 12 April 2010.

The information available from that date is set out below:

Council	Number of Firework Licences Issued 12/4/2010 – 31/12/2010	Number of Firework Licences Issued 1/1/2011 – 15/11/2011
Antrim	21	22

Council	Number of Firework Licences Issued 12/4/2010 – 31/12/2010	Number of Firework Licences Issued 1/1/2011 – 15/11/2011
Ards	38	27
Armagh	19	17
Banbridge	11	4
Belfast	64	57
Ballymena	20	22
Ballymoney	11	6
Carrickfergus	14	11
Castlereagh	17	14
Coleraine	21	15
Cookstown	12	6
Craigavon	19	12
Derry	12	17
Down	36	39
Dungannon	14	17
Fermanagh	64	47
Larne	8	4
Limavady	2	7
Lisburn	30	31
Magherafelt	13	10
Moyle	6	7
Newry and Mourne	68	79
Newtownabbey	33	23
North Down	37	35
Omagh	14	12
Strabane	11	13

Convictions for Using a Mobile Phone Whilst Driving

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for using a mobile phone whilst driving have been dealt with in court instead of by a Fixed Penalty Notice in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 4498/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of convictions for using a mobile phone whilst driving, by court division, for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for using a mobile phone whilst driving by court division 2006-2008

Court division	Year		
	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	5	26	175
Ards	4	38	156
Armagh and South Down	6	15	160
Belfast	13	53	295
Craigavon and Lisburn	4	14	141
Fermanagh and Tyrone	6	41	177
Londonderry	1	14	118
Total	39	201	1222

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Employment Tribunals

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Justice how many employment tribunals have been taken by staff against the Office of the Police Ombudsman in the last four years; and how many are ongoing.

(AQW 4499/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Office of the Police Ombudsman (OPONI) has advised me that there have been four employment tribunals initiated by staff against OPONI in the last four years. Two of these cases are currently ongoing, and two cases were withdrawn prior to a hearing.

Office of the Police Ombudsman: Legal Fees Relating to Staffing Issues

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent on legal fees relating to staffing issues in the Office of the Police Ombudsman in the last four years.

(AQW 4500/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Office of the Police Ombudsman has advised me that £61,072.87 has been spent on legal fees relating to all staffing issues in the last four financial years, including the first five months up to August 2011 of this financial year.

Legislation

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice whether he will bring forward proposals for the introduction of legislation similar 'Sarah's Law'.

(AQW 4512/11-15)

Mr Ford: Disclosure of information to protect children already takes place here and will continue to do so under normal police operating practices. Parents and others who have immediate concerns about any individual who they fear is posing a risk to the safety of a child can, and should, go to the police at any time about their concerns. The PSNI have in place public protection teams to deal with these issues.

I informed the Justice Committee earlier this year that I propose to open the policy consideration of a potential disclosure scheme to wider consultation. I intend to return to the Committee early in the New Year with the aim of publishing a policy consultation paper shortly thereafter.

The Northern Ireland Police Fund and the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to outline the role his Department has in (i) setting the criteria for; and (ii) allocating assistance under the (a) Northern Ireland Police Fund; and (b) Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust.

(AQW 4518/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department sponsors both the Northern Ireland Police Fund and the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust and manages that relationship within the framework of a Management Statement Financial Memorandum [MSFM]. The MSFM is drawn up by my Department on the basis of an established formula from DFP and in consultation with each sponsored body. It sets out the legal and administrative framework, as appropriate, within which the body will operate. Regular monitoring is carried out to check that these conditions are upheld.

The terms and conditions set out in the MSFM may be supplemented by guidelines or directions issued by the Department in respect of the exercise of any individual functions, powers and duties of the groups.

Prosecutions and Convictions for Failing to Wear a Seatbelt

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions have been secured in each of the last five years for failing to wear a seatbelt.

(AQW 4528/11-15)

Mr Ford: Failure to wear seat belt offences may be prosecuted under Articles 23(3), 24(2) and 24(5) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Seat belt offences can also be dealt with by endorsable Fixed Penalty Notices.

The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 2004 to 2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 – 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 and 2008.

Number of people prosecuted and convicted for wearing seat belt offences 2004-2008

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2004	78	71
2005	64	60
2006	59	55

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2007	n/a	154
2008	n/a	606

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2004 - 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Offences Relating to Wildlife Crime

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) charged; (ii) prosecuted; and (iii) convicted of offences relating to wildlife crime in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4571/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offences with respect to wildlife crime are not specified in the PSNI recorded crime figures and so PSNI Statistics Branch would not be in a position to provide figures on the number of persons charged.

Wildlife crimes may be prosecuted under The Wildlife (NI) Order 1985.

The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 2004 to 2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 – 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people prosecuted and convicted of a Wildlife crime 2004-2008

Year	Number of Persons Prosecuted	Number of Persons Convicted
2004	0	0
2005	0	0
2006	3	3
2007	n/a	0
2008	n/a	1

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 and 2008. Data for 2004 to 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Safety Cameras on Roads

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the number of (i) speeding offences; and (ii) other offences that were detected by the use of safety cameras on roads, and the revenue resulting from the offences in each year between 2005 and 2010.

(AQW 4576/11-15)

Mr Ford: Where a motorist is detected by a camera for speeding or red light running a Conditional Offer Fixed Penalty Notice is issued by the police. The table below sets out the number of speeding detections caught on mobile and fixed cameras together with the number of detections for red light running.

Detections by Northern Ireland Road Safety Camera Partnership¹

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Mobile Camera (including SPECS) ²	9283	9732	12102	14426	20396	37020
Fixed Camera	2869	3485	3767	2728	2364	10039
Total (Speeding)	12152	13217	15869	17154	22760	47059
Red Light Running Camera	0	0	435	720	802	878
Grand Total	12152	13217	16304	17874	23562	47937

1 Data supplied by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Road Safety Camera Partnership is currently working on quality assurance of these statistics and the information provided should therefore be regarded as provisional and subject to change. This information will be finalised and published on the NIDirect website in the next few months.

2 Speed Enforcement Camera System

The information requested on revenue is not available as sought as the revenue received for Conditional Offer Fixed Penalty Notice offences is not broken down by offence type. However, the total sums received on foot of a Conditional Offer Fixed Penalty Notice are set out below.

Revenue for Conditional Offer Fixed Penalty Notices 2005 to 2010

Year	Amount
2005	£640,440
2006	£572,940
2007	£716,220
2008	£735,420
2009	£1,033,680
2010	£879,360

Note:

Payments on Conditional Offer Fixed Penalty Notices are based on the date of issue of the Notice. These yearly figures may therefore be subject to change if monies are received on older tickets.

Prison Review Team

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Prison Review Team is retained under contract or if its remit has now ended.

(AQW 4592/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Review Team is not retained under contract and its remit ended on 24 October 2011 with the publication of the final report.

Police Stations Facing Potential Closure

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to list the police stations that are currently facing potential closure.

(AQW 4617/11-15)

Mr Ford: The future of police stations is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Trial of Sarah-Jane Law at Craigavon Crown Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the costs incurred in the trial of Sarah-Jane Law at Craigavon Crown Court for the alleged theft of two bunches of flowers, broken down by (i) prosecution costs; (ii) defence costs; (iii) court costs; (iv) jury costs; and (v) any other associated costs.

(AQW 4676/11-15)

Mr Ford: Some of the costs associated with this case are not yet known and not all agencies hold cost information at case level. The figures set out in the table below should therefore be treated as provisional estimates.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
PPS Prosecution	£1,355.001
PSNI Prosecution	£328.802
Defence (Legal Aid Costs)	£5,600.003
Court: Judiciary, Staff	£2,207.50
Jury Costs	£380.67
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£275.00
Total	£10,146.97

1 It is not possible to produce precise PPS costings for particular cases. The amount of time required to take individual decisions as to prosecution will vary depending on a range of factors including the complexity of the case and the extent of the case papers. Some costs are identifiable, for example, the fees paid to prosecuting counsel and expert witnesses.

2 These are the only identifiable PSNI costs and relate to the Investigating Officer's attendance at court.

3 As this case only concluded at the end of October, the claims for payment have just recently been submitted. As such the final fees have not yet been assessed and paid.

Prison Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether any consultation has been carried out on any proposition to end (i) prisons being called “Her Majesty’s prisons” and (ii) the crown being part of the symbol of the Prison Service.

(AQW 4686/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been no consultations carried out on any propositions to end either prisons being called “Her Majesty’s Prisons” or the crown being part of the symbol of the Prison Service.

However, these are amongst issues which were subject to discussion between NIPS management and staff associations on a number of occasions prior to the devolution of Justice.

Randalstown, Crumlin and Antrim Police Stations: Capital Expenditure

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Justice how much the capital expenditure was on (i) Randalstown; (ii) Crumlin; and (ii) Antrim Police Station in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4698/11-15)

Mr Ford: The allocation of funding is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Convictions for Breach of a Road Traffic Sign

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice how many convictions for breach of a road traffic sign have been dealt with in court instead of by a Fixed Penalty Notice in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 4801/11-15)

Mr Ford: Breaches of road traffic signs may be prosecuted under Article 50 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for breaching road traffic signs by court division 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	28	61	52
Ards	14	14	24
Armagh and South Down	13	8	16
Belfast	49	105	101
Craigavon and Lisburn	11	15	20
Fermanagh and Tyrone	45	37	28
Londonderry	21	25	32
Total	181	265	273

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Department for Regional Development

Clearing Footpaths of Ice and Snow

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what indemnification local councils which clear footpaths of ice and snow have against legal claims from people who have fallen or injured themselves on these footpaths.

(AQW 4036/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Councils, or groups of traders acting on their behalf, will have the same indemnity benefits as Roads Service, under proposals put forward by my Department. This is on the basis that the Department has a power to take reasonable and practicable measures to prevent snow and ice from interfering with safe public passage over the public highway.

My Department’s Roads Service has advised that mainly due to financial constraints, not all of the roads and footways in Northern Ireland can be treated. The Department’s indemnity relates to its treatment policy, which provides for the treatment of 28% of the roads network (which carries around 80% of traffic).

Similarly, Councils which enter into the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department will have identified and prioritised important primary pedestrian routes for treatment in exceptional weather conditions. Provision is made for these routes to be agreed and is set out in the schedule to the MOU. A Council's delegated indemnity would operate in a similar manner, in relation to its selection of primary footfall routes identified and prioritised for treatment.

Clearing Footpaths of Ice and Snow

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the total financial assistance that his Department will provide to local councils to assist with the clearing of snow and ice from pavements during the upcoming winter.

(AQW 4037/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it was never envisaged that it would make any financial contribution to local Councils for the provision of this service.

The proposed partnering arrangements exist on the basis that Roads Service will provide the salt free of charge to the Councils who would, in turn, use any available labour to spread the salt. However, Roads Service will offer the Councils an annual service fee to help with the administration of this service. This service fee, which totals £30,000, was previously agreed with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), and will be allocated in accordance with the Service Fee scale currently in force, based on Council population.

Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield: Flooding

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it cost NI Water to provide assistance each time Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield experienced flooding in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 4045/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the cost of providing assistance in relation to flooding incidents at the Old Grand Jury Manor area of Saintfield is as set out in the table below.

Information for the years prior to the establishment of NIW in 2007 is not readily available.

Year	Number of Call-Outs	Cost of Call-Outs	Cost of Civil/ Remedial Work
1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008	4	£240	£120
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009	5	£300	£12,163
1 April 2009 – 31 October 2009	5	£300	£300

Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield: Flooding

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the total cost to NI Water for attending all the call-outs at Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield prior to the new drainage system being installed.

(AQW 4046/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that since its inception on 1 April 2007 staff have responded to 14 call-outs in relation to flooding incidents at the Old Grand Jury Manor area of Saintfield. The total cost of these call-outs was £840.

Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield: Flooding

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost to NI Water of installing the new drainage system at Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield, including the cost of disconnecting the illegal connection and the additional work to resolve any issues following the initial installation.

(AQW 4047/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the cost of this project was £10,489 (excluding VAT).

Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield: Flooding

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what contribution was made by the landowner of the field adjacent to Old Grand Jury Manor in Saintfield to the resolution of the flooding problems in the area; and what criteria were used to arrive at this level of contribution.

(AQW 4048/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the landowner made no contribution to the costs of the scheme but carried out work on his land to facilitate the discharge of the ground water into the new drainage system provided by my Department's Roads Service and NIW.

Fuel Efficiencies in Buses and Trains

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the practices in place to (i) monitor; and (ii) improve fuel efficiencies in (a) buses; and (b) trains.

(AQW 4100/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(a) Buses

Translink has informed me that a key consideration regarding bus fuel efficiency is that buses are a more fuel efficient form of transport than private cars in the sense that on average, once a bus has more than 6 passengers, it is more fuel efficient than a single-occupancy car. Modal shift to public transport will in itself contribute to fuel efficiency.

As for individual vehicles Translink has informed me that fuel consumption is monitored for all bus vehicles and reported on a monthly basis, allowing for any anomalies to be investigated. Monitoring is provided through monthly reports of how many miles individual vehicles have run compared with how much fuel was dispensed to the vehicle.

Efficient operation is supported by regular maintenance regimes that ensure vehicles are running at maximum efficiency. Oil sampling forms part of this activity, and can provide for early warning when engines have some specific fuel problems.

With electronic control of engines and gearboxes, it is possible on some vehicle types to optimise power train characteristics for the most efficient operation in the given operating circumstances. Where this is possible, maximum fuel efficiency settings have been identified and selected.

Within the past 18 months, Translink has rolled out a programme to install idle-shut down systems to over 75% of the fleet. The system will switch the engine off once it detects that it has been idling for either 4 minutes (summer) or 10 minutes (winter).

An eco-driving pilot was initiated in one Ulsterbus depot during 2010. This pilot has successfully demonstrated that specific driver training, supported by on-bus systems to inform drivers as to their 'driving style', can yield fuel efficiency gains. Due to the success of this pilot, a procurement exercise has commenced to roll out the system to the entire Ulsterbus/Metro fleet.

(b) Trains

Northern Ireland Railways' passenger fleet comprises 23 Class 3000 units and 13 near life-expired trains which are currently being replaced by 20 new Class 4000 units.

Generally new trains will consume marginally more fuel than older trains. This is due to their significantly higher performance; acceleration and top speed, their higher passenger amenities (e.g. air conditioning) and their increased weight to meet modern safety standards.

Therefore the primary contribution of new trains to fuel efficiency is their ability to attract significantly more passengers out of cars on to trains. In the past 9 years, NI Railways have attracted 65% more passenger journeys onto the network.

Further to the above Translink has informed me that fuel consumption is monitored for all rail vehicles and reported on a monthly basis, allowing for any anomalies to be investigated.

To improve fuel efficiency on Class 3000 trains a number of steps have been taken.

- Automatic engine shutdown sequence if driver not keyed in.
- Stabling mode on one engine only.
- Halogen saloon lighting replaced by energy efficient LED lighting

An 'Eco Meter and Train Driving Training Project' is being developed for Class 3000 trains to install eco meter systems on existing trains with additional driver training during 2011/12/13.

Class 4000 trains which are based on a development of Class 3000 trains include features which may contribute to greater fuel efficiency. For example:

- Reduced weight; 5 tonnes per train lighter than Class 3000.
- New energy efficient transmission; 10 – 20% improvement over Class 3000.
- Auxiliary power generated from traction engine rather than separate engine therefore energy recovery when braking
- Engines to latest Tier 3A European Union emissions standards.
- LED saloon lighting.
- Eco-meter system integrated into Train Management System.

From January 2012 Translink will be operating the trains on ULSD (Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel) instead of Gas Oil. This cleaner fuel will further reduce exhaust emissions.

NIR has a Train Driver Simulator. The simulator is used to impart driving skills and to assess drivers' performance while undergoing training. This train driving simulator is 7 years old; there is a project to provide a Simulation Refresh and Upgrade. This will include an eco-training and assessment module.

I understand that Translink has received some recent awards in the general field of energy efficiency for Transport companies.

Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee: Areas at Risk Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development why his departmental staff have not participated in meetings on the Areas at Risk Programme for the Beechfield Estate to which they have been invited.

(AQW 4127/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no record of having received any formal invitation to attend meetings relating to the Areas at Risk Programme for the Beechfield Estate in Donghadree. However, Roads Service officials would be willing to attend any future meetings, where roads related matters are to be discussed.

Housing Developments not Adopted

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development, in each of the last three years, how many housing developments have not been adopted by Roads Service in each constituency due to developers being placed in liquidation or administration.

(AQW 4135/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a developer going into liquidation or administration is not in itself a reason for not adopting a development. In cases where the developer has gone into liquidation or administration, the appointed receiver or representative is expected to carry out all necessary ongoing maintenance and undertake work to bring the streets up to the standard required for adoption by Roads Service. Failure by the administrator to do so will result in further enforcement being issued under Article 11 of the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, whereby Roads Service can complete the necessary works required for adoption and recover the costs from the existing road bonds.

I would advise the Member that Roads Service does not hold the information on a constituency basis as requested. However, the table below details the information by Roads Service Section Office:

Number of Housing Developments not adopted by Roads Service due to Developers being placed into liquidation or administration

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Omagh	2	0	4
Fermanagh	0	1	11
Dungannon	1	3	9
Cookstown	0	0	0
Strabane	4	0	1
Magherafelt	0	0	1
Ards	1	3	3
Down	0	6	1
Newry & Mourne	0	7	2
Armagh	0	1	1
Banbridge	0	1	1
Craigavon	3	5	6
Londonderry	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0
Coleraine	3	1	4
Moyle	1	0	0
Ballymoney	0	4	0
Ballymena	0	0	0
Larne	1	0	0
Antrim	1	0	0
Belfast North	0	1	2
Belfast South	0	0	1
North Down	0	1	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	0
Lisburn	3	4	6
Castlereagh	1	1	2
Newtownabbey	4	1	1

Article 11 of the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of housing developments in each local council area which are subject to Article 11 of the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 whereby Roads Service and other agencies have had to complete site works.

(AQW 4136/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that Roads Service does not hold the information by council area as requested. However, the table below details the information by Roads Service Section Office:

	Number of Housing Developments issued with an Article 11 Notice			Number of Sites completed by Roads Service or others		
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	*		**
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Omagh	2	0	0	2	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	3	0	0	0
Dungannon	1	0	0	1	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	3	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ards	0	6	4	1	0	0
Down	2	8	8	1	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	2	2	0	0	0
Armagh	3	4	4	0	3	2
Banbridge	1	2	4	0	1	2
Craigavon	5	6	5	5	2	10
Londonderry	1	2	6	3	2	1
Limavady	0	0	1	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	6	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymoney	1	6	4	0	1	5
Ballymena	2	0	0	0	1	1
Larne	0	1	1	0	1	1
Antrim	1	1	1	0	1	2
Belfast North	4	2	3	0	0	4
Belfast South	1	0	0	0	0	1
North Down	2	2	0	0	0	1
Carrickfergus	2	1	1	2	0	0
Lisburn	5	5	2	0	0	3
Castlereagh	3	3	0	0	0	1
Newtownabbey	3	0	1	1	0	0

* These figures may include sites where the Article 11 Notice was served prior to 2009.

** These figures may include sites where work has commenced and is anticipated to be completed during this financial year.

Ilex Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked Minister for Regional Development, with regard to Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4141/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the information requested in respect of projects in the Ilex Regeneration Plan, One City, One Plan, One Voice.

(i) Funds from Minister's 2011/12 Budget that have been committed to projects under above programme	(ii) List of projects that are being funded	(iii) The start dates for these projects
£2.1 million	A6 Derry-Dungiven	Statutory Orders to be published in December 2011, with Public Inquiry possible in 2012
£820,000	A6 Randalstown – Castledawson	Public Inquiry possible Spring 2012
£10.6 million	A5 Newbuildings- Aughnacloy	
£550,000	Implementation of traffic management programmes within the City.	Ongoing
£100,000	Western Orbital Feasibility Study	Currently under way
£1.9 million	Madams Bank Road widening	Currently under construction
£1.5 million	Culmore Road Roundabout	Officially opened 13 October 2011

Only details of funding for the 2011/12 financial year have been provided, as commitments for future years have still to be confirmed. The Irish Government's recent indication, that it is unable to part fund the A5 and A8 projects as originally envisaged, will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme

Bogside Area of Derry: Residents' Parking Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3488/11-15, to outline the time-scale for the completion of the legislative procedures for the residents parking scheme in the Bogside area of Derry.
(AQW 4154/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that I am currently considering the review of the Economic Appraisal for Residents' Parking Schemes in Londonderry and other areas of Northern Ireland. Until that process is complete, I am unable to provide a definitive time-scale for the completion of the legislative procedures.

As this is a new initiative in Northern Ireland, there are still other issues to be developed within this process, such as practical matters, dealing with administration and permits.

Londonderry to Belfast Bus Route

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Londonderry to Belfast bus route includes a stop at the Antrim Area Hospital.
(AQW 4155/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Londonderry to Belfast bus route is serviced by the Goldline Express 212 and 273 services, neither of which stops at the Antrim Area Hospital.

There are, however, 9 daily weekday rail services operating from Londonderry which stop at the Antrim Bus and Rail Station where passengers can access the Ulsterbus service to Antrim Area Hospital. There are 8 such rail services on a Saturday and 5 on a Sunday.

Bus Routes that include stops at the Antrim Area Hospital

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the bus routes that include stops at the Antrim Area Hospital.
(AQW 4156/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Translink Ulsterbus services which serve Antrim Area Hospital are as follows:

- 109C: Crumlin – Belfast International Airport – Antrim Bus/Rail Station – Antrim Area Hospital;
- 168B/154: Carrickfergus – Ballyclare – Antrim Area Hospital;
- 321E: Antrim Town Service – Antrim Area Hospital;
- 120A: Ballymena – Antrim Bus/Rail Station – Antrim Area Hospital – Belfast.

From July 2012 Translink is planning to re-route the 219 Goldline Service from Ballymena – Antrim Bus and Rail Station - Belfast to include a regular stop at Antrim Area Hospital.

A5 Road Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, given his response to a question following his oral Ministerial statement on 7 November that “No firm conclusions have been indicated yet by the Irish Government in respect of their funding”, whether he will review his Department's commitment to the A5 road project.
(AQW 4159/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will be aware since my statement on 7 November 2011, the Minister for Transport in the ROI has confirmed that his Government's investment in transport infrastructure will be scaled back significantly. As a result, the ROI Government has indicated it is unable to part-fund the A5 and A8 schemes as originally envisaged.

A reallocation of funding to my Department is anticipated and when this is confirmed, I will consider spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the strategic roads programme.

Cloughey: 40mph Speed Limit

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made in the review of the 40mph speed limit in the village of Cloughey.

(AQW 4182/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that having carried out a review of the speed limits in Cloughey, which included all of the factors that are relevant to setting speed limits and consulting with the PSNI, it does not consider that a reduction in the speed limit in Cloughey, from its current level of 40 mph, is necessary.

Committee for Regional Development: Cost of Trip to France with Members

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the cost of his recent trip to France with Members of the Committee for Regional Development, including the cost of the overnight stays in Omagh; and whether this trip represented value for money given the financial constraints within Government Departments.

(AQW 4186/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As we move forward in the development of our plans for Belfast Rapid Transit, and in advance of the public consultation, which I launched in October, I felt that it was important for me, and colleagues from the Regional Development Committee and Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh Councils, to see the benefits which a rapid transit system could bring to a city comparable in size to Belfast. Nantes BusWay is widely regarded as the leading example of bus rapid transit in Europe. A number of aspects of the Nantes system are being considered for Belfast.

On 21 September 2011, I therefore led a delegation on a study visit to view the Bus Rapid Transit System in Nantes. Neither I nor my officials stayed overnight in Omagh as part of this visit. The Regional Development Committee and Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh Councils were responsible for their own costs. Costs incurred by my Department are detailed below.

Accommodation (8 persons)	£1480.83
Dinner/hospitality for delegation & hosts (26 Persons)	£ 943.87
Travel and Subsistence (airfares, buses etc) (8 persons)	£1626.33

Small User Dispensation for Water Usage

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has considered a 'small user dispensation' for water usage; and to outline the estimated cost of implementing such a scheme.

(AQW 4205/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The previous Executive agreed the Independent Water Review Panel recommendation that all non-domestic consumers should contribute towards the cost of water and sewerage services.

Qualifying non-domestic consumers with a meter already receive an allowance of 100m³ free water every 6 months, which is worth up to £200 per year on usage. Non-domestic consumers without a meter get a 50% discount on charges.

This is a more generous level of support than anywhere else in the UK. The majority of non-domestic consumers are metered and, therefore, receive bills which are partly based on consumption.

The cost of providing further support to small users would depend on where the line is drawn and the details of scheme. There would be an implementation cost depending on the extent of the changes to NIW's billing system.

Under the existing legislation the setting and approving of water and sewerage tariffs is the responsibility of NI Water subject to the approval of the Utility Regulator. Both are obliged to ensure that there is no undue discrimination against any class of customers and should keep tariffs under review to see if adjusting tariffs could result in a better reflection of costs. Additional costs would need to be met from charges.

In relation to domestic consumers, the Executive subsidises the cost of water and sewerage services on their behalf.

Translink Fleet: Age of Buses and Coaches

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to state the average age of buses and coaches within the Translink fleet at 30 September in (i) 2009; (ii) 2010; and (iii) 2011.

(AQW 4206/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the average age of buses and coaches within Translink's fleet for the years required. These are included in the NI Transport Statistics 2010/11 (Table 1) published by my department.

Average Fleet Age (Years)

	Ulsterbus	Metro
2008/09	7.2	6.2
2009/10	6.4	7.1
2010/11	6.2	8.0

The figures represent the year end position for 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 respectively.

Antisocial Behaviour, Abuse or Vandalism on Buses and Trains

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of reported cases of anti-social behaviour, abuse or vandalism on buses and trains in the last three years; and the number of successful prosecutions taken against the offenders. (AQW 4208/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that the relevant statistics need to be separately reported for bus and rail.

The reported number of recorded incidents of vandalism, and antisocial behaviour information required is as follows.

Calendar Year	NIR					
	Safety-related		Anti-social behaviour		Vandalism	
	No. of incidents	No. of individuals prosecuted	No. of incidents	No. of individuals prosecuted	No. of incidents	No. of individuals prosecuted
2008	63	85	28	35	2	2
2009	110	137	33	38	4	4
2010	102	135	35	39	1	1
Totals	275	357	96	112	7	7

Antisocial behaviour incorporates cases of abuse.

Financial Year	Ulsterbus/Metro							
	Assaults on staff	Assaults on passengers	Stone throwing	Vandalism on board bus	Vandalism at bus station	Inappropriate behaviour	Disruption by member of public	Intoxication of member of public
	No. of incidents							
2008/09	26	37	558	40	11	82	5	5
2009/10	33	15	495	27	7	113	7	9
2010/11	35	19	444	25	5	111	17	1
Totals	94	71	1497	92	23	306	29	15

Prosecutions in relation to bus operations are recorded against 'anti-social behaviour'. The number of individuals prosecuted is as follows.

Financial Year	Ulsterbus/Metro No. of Prosecutions
2008/09	2
2009/10	5
2010/11	2

The number of prosecutions on bus is considerably less than for rail because of different regulatory regimes in place. My officials are currently reviewing this issue.

Fare Evasion on Buses and Trains

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of people charged with fare evasion on buses and trains in the last five years; and (ii) the number of successful prosecutions. (AQW 4209/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Passengers charged with fare evasion on Translink services are as follows:

Calendar Year	NIR	Ulsterbus	Citybus (Metro)
2006	23	4	0
2007	29	4	0
2008	32	4	0
2009	54	7	3
2010	25	8	1
2011 (to 23/09/11)	16	1	2

All of those charged with fare evasion were successfully prosecuted.

County Fermanagh: Surface Water on Roads

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all works that his Department has taken to reduce the amount of surface water on roads in County Fermanagh since January 2010.

(AQW 4232/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that substantial funds were made available to Roads Service to elevate a number of roads in Fermanagh to prevent a repeat of the flooding in 2009. Details of this work were contained in the Fermanagh Flooding Task Force Report, copied to all Fermanagh Councillors on 2 March 2010.

When resurfacing is carried out on any road, the shape of the road is improved to help direct surface water towards gullies or outlets.

In addition, my Department's Roads Service carries out routine maintenance cleaning of gullies, outlets and drains each autumn/winter with a view to reducing the amount of surface water on roads.

Information on completed and proposed roads schemes can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

M1 Motorway: Dedicated Bus Lane

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development how many buses, on average, use the dedicated bus lane on the M1 motorway on each day from Monday to Friday.

(AQW 4235/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has informed me that from Monday to Friday, there are a total of 73 Translink Services per day (365 services per week) using the dedicated bus lane on the M1 motorway.

Free Travel Card Scheme for Translink Employees

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much the free travel card scheme for Translink employees has cost in each of the last five years broken down by (i) employees; and (ii) employees' spouses and partners.

(AQW 4291/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that there are 2,536 'spouse/partner' passes and 1,980 'dependants' passes in circulation at the present time

In relation to the cost of travel made using these cards to the organisation, Translink does not extract this type of usage data from its information management systems for this group of individuals. The number of individual journeys made using such passes is recorded as part of its periodic passenger journey information, which is sufficient for business needs. For these reasons quantification of the cost is very difficult.

Translink has also informed me that there is a nominal cost to the organisation for the production of free travel passes, similar to Senior Smartpass, 60+ Pass, Education & Library Board pass.

Ballymoney: Water Quality Issue

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what caused the recent water quality issue in Ballymoney; and what steps he intends to take to make sure it does not happen again.

(AQW 4306/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a rigorous investigation was undertaken following the first indication of water quality problems in the Ballymoney area and a comprehensive action plan was implemented to restore water quality to its normal high standard. Investigations centred on recent water main work in the area being undertaken as part of the £90 million water main rehabilitation programme. During the course of the work a number of pipe connections had to be

undertaken which coincided with very heavy rainfall which may possibly have contributed to a small amount of excavated material entering the new water mains. Water quality testing is carried out routinely after rehabilitation work and there were indications that the water quality may have been affected by the excavated material. NIW must contact the Public Health Agency in all cases of water quality problems, and following discussions with them it was decided that, as a precautionary measure, customers in the area should be advised to boil water for drinking and cooking purposes. The action plan to restore the water quality in Ballymoney was successful and the boil water notice has now been removed for all customers in the area.

There is a well defined approach to work on the water main system taking into account stringent health and safety standards and water quality testing. The water main rehabilitation programme has been operating for two years with many hundreds of kilometres of new water mains laid, and it is very rare that water quality problems arise following the work.

Rasharkin: Interruption to the Water Supply

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what caused the interruption to the water supply in Rasharkin in October 2011; and (ii) whether businesses which lost trade as a result of the interruption will be compensated.

(AQW 4307/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is undertaking a major water mains rehabilitation programme in the Rasharkin area. The £90 million programme of water mains replacement is designed to improve the water quality and water pressure to customers in the area. The work involves connections being made to the existing water system which requires the water supplies to be shut down temporarily. It is possible that the interruptions you refer to may have been a result of these planned shutdowns. However, customers are normally advised in advance of all of these planned interruptions.

Unfortunately, unplanned interruptions to the water supplies can occur in any area as a result of pipes bursting for a variety of reasons. NIW recognises that such interruptions do inconvenience customers and it aims to repair any bursts and to restore water supplies as quickly as possible.

Compensation is not payable where NIW is fulfilling its statutory obligations and where no damage has been caused to any subject premises.

Doneyshiel Road, Rasharkin

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any works the Roads Service has planned for the Doneyshiel Road, Rasharkin, in the current financial year; and when the work will commence.

(AQW 4308/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Doneyshiel Road is a minor, lightly trafficked, rural road and was surface dressed during last summer. No further works on this road are planned for the current financial year.

However, Roads Service officials have informed me that, in order to eliminate the worst of the surface undulations and improve the ride quality, a minor road surface overlay on one short stretch of the carriageway will be considered for inclusion on a future works programme, subject to the availability of finance.

Roads Service will also continue to carry out maintenance on this stretch of road to keep the carriageway surface in a safe condition, in accordance with its maintenance policy and standards.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the recent announcement about the funding from the Irish Government for the A5 road scheme, whether he intends to review the capital spend on roads such as the A26 in order to progress the scheme as soon as possible.

(AQW 4321/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

As the Irish Government has indicated it is unable to part-fund the A5 and A8, as originally envisaged, this will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme. In the meantime, development work on the A26 project will continue, with the aim of publishing the draft Orders and Environmental Statement in 2012.

I am conscious that investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector and in the longer term particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the A5 project has been postponed, whether part of the £400 million budget will be redirected to the A26 North Coast dualling scheme.

(AQW 4347/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The member will be aware that the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

As the Irish Government has indicated it is unable to part-fund the A5 and A8, as originally envisaged, this will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme. In the meantime, development work on the A26 project will continue, with the aim of publishing the draft Orders and Environmental Statement in 2012.

I am conscious that investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector and in the longer term particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness.

A26 Road Scheme: More Underpasses

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development what further consideration he will give to the creation of more underpasses on the proposed A26 road scheme.

(AQW 4355/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the provision of cattle creeps, which may take the form of either an underpass or an overbridge, have been considered as part of landowner accommodation works on the proposed A26 dual carriageway. The needs of individual farms, for example their layout and management, as well as details of the frequency and type of movement of cattle, size of the herd, the degree of severance, the opportunity to share facilities and road user safety have been assessed.

Roads Service has no legal obligation to carry out accommodation works, as liability is limited to monetary consideration only. If, and when, accommodation works are carried out by the Department, the effect is to mitigate the compensation payable in respect of land taken and injurious affection to land retained by the landowner. In this respect, the cost of accommodation works in terms of value to the property is taken into account by DFP's Land & Property Services (LPS) in assessing the overall compensation payable in respect of land and/or rights acquired.

When taking all of this information into account, my Department's Roads Service concluded that the provision of any agricultural crossing for landowners along the proposed A26 road scheme, would not be economically viable.

Displaying of Flags on Roads Service Owned Property

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether it is illegal under the Roads (NI) Order 1993 to display a flag on Roads Service owned property.

(AQW 4609/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Article 87 of The Roads (NI) Order 1993 makes it an offence to attach unauthorised signs and advertisements upon the surface of a road, tree, structure or other works in or on a road. However, the Roads Order does not specifically make reference to flags, and my Department does not have an explicit power under the Order in relation to the flying of flags on Roads Service owned property, such as lampposts.

Nonetheless, Roads Service does have powers under Article 44 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 enabling it to remove flags or attachments that pose a danger to road users. Where there is no such danger, Roads Service acts in accordance with the multi-agency Joint Protocol in Relation to the Display of Flags in Public Areas. Under the Protocol, Roads Service will, when called upon by the lead Agency, provide the access equipment and resources to remove unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached for their removal and where they are not easily accessible for the local community.

Respond to Written and Oral Assembly Questions: Cost

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written, oral and urgent oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4660/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department for Regional Development does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and so the information requested is not available.

Department for Social Development

Jobseeker's Allowance: Recipients in Portavogie

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of recipients of Job-seekers Allowance in Portavogie in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4038/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The table below shows the number of people receiving Jobseeker's Allowance at March for the years 2007 – 2011 in the Portavogie Ward.

Date	Recipients in Portavogie Ward
March 2007	42
March 2008	29
March 2009	53
March 2010	71
March 2011	108

Data source Jobseeker's Allowance claimant count scans March 2007, March 2008, March 2009, March 2010 and March 2011

Social Security Offices

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current number and locations of Social Security offices. (AQW 4058/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently 8 Social Security Offices as detailed below. These offices form part of a network of local offices that include 27 Jobs and Benefits Offices and three Community Benefit Offices.

Names and addresses of offices are as follows:

Social Security Offices	
Ballynahinch Social Security Office	18 Crossgar Road, Ballynahinch, BT24 8XP
Bangor Social Security Office	110 Hamilton Road, Bangor, BT20 4LG.
Cookstown Social Security Office	38-40 Fairhill Road, Cookstown, BT80 8AG
Corporation Street Social Security Office	24-42 Corporation Street, Belfast, BT1 3RD.
Downpatrick Social Security Office	9-11 Mount Crescent, Downpatrick, BT30 6NQ.
Newcastle Social Security Office	31 Valentia Park, Newcastle, BT33 0EH.
Newtownards Social Security Office	East Street, Newtownards, BT23 3EL.
Strabane Social Security Office	Urney Road, Strabane, BT82 9BX.

Housing Benefit

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many families are currently in receipt of housing benefit. (AQW 4059/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently 60,483 live housing benefit claims where a dependant child or young person is included in the household.

A claimant's family, for benefit purposes, is defined as: -

- The claimants partner(s), if a member of the same household; and
- Any child(ren) or young person(s) the claimant is responsible for (not just sons and daughters)

and who are treated as members of the household.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of the number of households that will take advantage of the Warm Homes scheme in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 4080/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Public Service Agreement target for 2010/2011 is to assist approximately 9,000 households by implementing energy efficiency improvement measures and I am confident that this target will be met.

Employment and Support Allowance Claimants

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have undergone a work capability assessment since the awarding of the assessment contract to Atos Origin, broken by district council area.

(AQW 4109/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The transition date of medical services from the Social Security Agency to ATOS Healthcare took place on 20 June 2011. Since this date, 8,145 Work Capability Assessments have been conducted. The information requested cannot be broken down by district council area.

Employment and Support Allowance Claimants

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have been deemed 'fit for work' or to have a 'limited capability for work' following a work capability assessment carried out by Atos Origin, broken by district council area.

(AQW 4111/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not hold information in the form requested. The Employment and Support Allowance's management information system does not differentiate between customers who have been deemed 'fit for work' having been examined by ATOS Healthcare and those who have been found fit for work before ATOS Healthcare took over on 20 June 2011.

Employment and Support Allowance Claimants

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have appealed being deemed 'fit for work' following a work capability assessment by Atos Origin, broken by district council area.

(AQW 4116/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not hold information in the form requested. The Employment and Support Allowance's management information system does not differentiate between customers who have appealed being deemed 'fit for work' having been examined by ATOS Healthcare and those who have been found fit for work before ATOS Healthcare took over on 20 June 2011.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development, for each district council area (i) how much funding has been allocated for the Boiler Replacement Scheme; and (ii) how many applications have been refused for failing to meet the criteria to date.

(AQW 4173/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have made £2 million available for the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme and the Housing Executive is managing the delivery of the scheme. The funding for the pilot scheme has not been formally allocated on a district council basis, however, expenditure is being managed on a Housing Executive's grants office level.

The table overleaf provides a breakdown by District Council Area of those applications for the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme that, as at 31 October 2011, had been deemed ineligible on

- (i) grounds of personal eligibility criteria; or
- (ii) where the existing boiler did not meet the technical criteria of the scheme.

There are a total of 762 ineligible applicants and 4 ineligible boilers.

District Council Area	Applications deemed ineligible on personal eligibility criteria	Applications deemed ineligible because existing boilers did not meet technical criteria
Antrim	9	0
Ards	12	0
Armagh	74	0
Ballymena	14	0
Ballymoney	16	1
Banbridge	22	0
Belfast	43	0
Carrickfergus	6	0
Castlereagh	15	0
Coleraine	16	1
Cookstown	42	0
Craigavon	52	0
Derry	36	0
Down	27	0
Dungannon & South Tyrone	61	0
Fermanagh	36	0
Larne	6	0
Limavady	17	0
Lisburn	26	0
Magherafelt	19	0

District Council Area	Applications deemed ineligible on personal eligibility criteria	Applications deemed ineligible because existing boilers did not meet technical criteria
Moyle	14	1
Newry & Mourne	107	0
Newtownabbey	25	1
North Down	17	0
Omagh	26	0
Strabane	24	0
Total	762	4

Benefit Appeal Tribunals: Panel

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development whether members on the panel of benefit appeal tribunals are paid per day or per appeal hearing.

(AQW 4187/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are two full time salaried members of the tribunal and 173 paid panel members.

All fee paid panel members receive fees payable on a sessional basis. A sessional sitting is for one half-day i.e. 3 ½ hours duration with either a morning or afternoon start time and may include multiple appeal hearings.

Pension Credit: Automatic Payment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the pilot scheme in England and Wales in 2010, what plans there are to introduce the automatic payment of pension credit.

(AQW 4202/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The detailed evaluation report on the research study into automatic payment of Pension Credit in Great Britain is expected to be published by the Department of Work and Pensions in Spring 2012. Officials are continuing to track that work and any recommendations or changes that emerge as a result of the study will be carefully considered for Northern Ireland at that time, at which point I will examine the possibility of the introduction of automatic payment of State Pension Credit.

Prisoners: Disability Living Allowance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) remand; and (ii) sentenced prisoners in each prison facility are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 4234/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Persons held in custody who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance are subject to a suspension of benefit following detention. The Social Security Agency and Northern Ireland Prison Service have a process in place to ensure that social security benefits, where applicable, are not inappropriately paid to those held in custody.

Supporting People Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the funding allocated to the Supporting People Programme in the Foyle constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 4279/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The figures provided below reflect the current Supporting People allocation under the Comprehensive Spending Review in the Foyle constituency.

Client Population	Number of Contracted Services	Number of Contracted Units	2011/12 Budget	2012/13 Forecast	2013/14 Forecast
Frail Elderly	3	50	370,517	370,517	370,517
Homeless Families with Support Needs	7	113	454,598	454,598	454,598
Older People with Mental Health Problems / Dementia	3	35	146,164	146,164	146,164
Older people with support needs	24	715	641,188	641,188	641,188
People with a Physical or Sensory Disability	2	17	152,794	152,794	152,794
People with Alcohol Problems	5	89	947,495	947,495	947,495
People with Learning Disabilities	4	97	410,749	410,749	410,749

Client Population	Number of Contracted Services	Number of Contracted Units	2011/12 Budget	2012/13 Forecast	2013/14 Forecast
People with Mental Health Problems	12	151	1,093,563	1,093,563	1,093,563
Single Homeless with Support Needs	3	87	1,024,595	1,024,595	1,024,595
Teenage Parents	1	16	221,653	221,653	221,653
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	3	71	537,490	537,490	537,490
Young People at Risk	5	105	873,278	873,278	873,278
Total	72	1,546	6,874,082	6,874,082	6,874,082

Supporting People Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Supporting People Programme will remain within his Department.

(AQW 4280/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development has maintained the Supporting People programme budget for the next four years. My department continues to work closely with relevant Department's, Health and Social Care Trusts and stakeholders to ensure that the delivery of the programme continues to be cost effective, provides value for money and supports the most vulnerable people in our society to live independently. There is currently no change to my Department's responsibility for the delivery of the Supporting People programme, however there is ongoing and regular discussions with our partners to ensure that the current arrangements in place remain relevant for the future delivery of the programme.

Fuel Poverty

Ms Lewis asked the Minister for Social Development what financial benefits are available to people in fuel poverty.

(AQW 4286/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Financial help is available through a range of Social Security benefits to individuals on low income depending on their individual and family circumstances. Cold Weather Payments may also be paid to those satisfying the qualifying conditions during periods of exceptionally cold weather. Additionally, individuals who are not automatically entitled, may claim a Winter Fuel Payment up to 30 March 2012 if they are born on or before 5 January 1951.

My Department, through the Social Security Agency, is also undertaking an extensive benefit uptake programme contacting older people and those on low incomes to ensure they are receiving their full benefit entitlement. On the 1st of November I launched an innovation fund of £375,000 to support third sector organisations to undertake a range of activities to increase benefit uptake among vulnerable groups. Ensuring people are receiving their full entitlement to benefits will go some way to alleviating increasing fuel costs and contribute to tackling fuel poverty.

My Department's new Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" was launched in April 2011. The strategy takes forward energy brokering, called for action on the price of oil imports, the introduction of a pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme and developed a range of other initiatives.

The Department currently delivers the Warm Homes Scheme and the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of vulnerable, fuel poor households. In addition, the Housing Executive administers an annual Heating Replacement Scheme which improves the energy efficiency of their stock.

Village Improvement Zone

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of households in the Village Improvement Zone (i) which have had a renovation grant approved and the total value of grants approved to date; (ii) for which the assessment process for a renovation grant has been initiated but a grant has not yet been approved; and (iii) which have not submitted an application for a renovation grant, and to outline the steps being taken to encourage uptake among these households.

(AQW 4300/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has approved nine Renovation Grants at a total value of £105,188 and six Home Repair Assistance Grants at a total value of £22,847 during the period August 2010 to November 2011. A total of 87 Preliminary enquiries have also been received during this period.

Housing Executive records indicate that there are 557 properties in private sector ownership in the Village Improvement area and to date 470 of these private owners have not submitted an enquiry for Discretionary Grant aid. Over the past fourteen months the Housing Executive's Belfast Grants office has been involved in a comprehensive, pro-active campaign to promote the grants scheme. This has been carried out in a number of ways including:-

- Invited reapplications from 37 cases cancelled due to budget control measures introduced in April 2009
- Established links with a local community group, Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT)
- Mail dropped grants information and application forms to every property

- Notified local public representatives (MP MLAs and Councillors) of grant availability
- Held grants awareness session with local Advice Workers
- Enlisted the assistance of a Field Worker from FOLD to help applicants through the grants system
- Housing Executive Technical member of staff currently going door to door giving advice and offering on-the-spot surveys. To date 466 properties have been issued with a hand-delivered invitation
- Held open days (locally) to assist grant applicants with the completion of their applications. The next event is in the Richview Regeneration Centre on the 29th November 2011.
- The Housing Executive's Grants office is in the process of writing to private Landlords, through their Letting Agents, to inform them of the availability of grant aid.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 3321/11-15, (i) what action his Department is taking to increase uptake of the Boiler Replacement Scheme, given that less than 9 percent of the funding has been allocated; and (ii) whether he will consider removing the Housing Benefit element from the criteria to increase participation.

(AQW 4311/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At the end of October 882 boiler eligibility forms have been issued to applicants who meet the personal qualifying criteria. 393 eligible boilers have been assessed and 219 approvals for work to proceed have been issued. My department has placed advertisements in all local press which will appear during week commencing 14 November. There is funding available to replace approximately 1,330 boilers and I am confident that this target will be met.

Housing Benefit is a qualifying benefit for the Warm Homes Scheme and the rationale for the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme was to assist a group of vulnerable householders who have never previously been eligible for government assistance. The pilot will be subject to a full evaluation once it is completed.

Disability Living Allowance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development whether people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance relinquish the benefit while they are in hospital or residential care after a specific period of time as an in-patient.

(AQW 4316/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Disability Living Allowance consists of two separate components. The mobility component is payable at the higher or lower rate and the care component can be payable at three different rates; high, middle and low. People can receive either the mobility component or care component or a combination of both.

When a person in receipt of Disability Living Allowance has been in hospital or a similar institution for more than 28 days (84 days if the disabled person is under 16), payment of this benefit is withdrawn. When a person has been in residential care (other than in a hospital or hospice) only payment of the care component of Disability Living Allowance is withdrawn after the number of days already stated. Payment of Disability Living Allowance is reinstated when a person leaves hospital or residential care providing entitlement still exists.

People who meet the full costs of their stay in hospital or residential care themselves will continue to be paid the Disability Living Allowance they are entitled to.

Air Travel: Costs

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total cost incurred by his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4346/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The details requested in respect of air travel costs incurred are provided below; the figures include any refunds from the business travel provider due to cancellation:

Travel Costs between Northern Ireland and	01/01/10 to 31/12/10 Net Cost £
Heathrow Airport	35,794
Other G.B. Airports (excluding Heathrow)	166,183

These costs must be considered in the context of the 7,000 plus staff working in the Department.

Pension Levels in the Public Sector

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact of the change to the index used to update pensions from April 2011 on pension levels in the public sector.

(AQW 4363/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pension levels in the public sector are a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel and other sponsoring Departments.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people currently (i) eligible to receive Disability Living Allowance; and (ii) in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 4364/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) My Department does not hold information on the total number of people who may be eligible to receive Disability Living Allowance. (ii) At October 2011, there were 187,379 people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

Fuel Poverty

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the introduction of a scheme to alleviate fuel poverty this winter.

(AQW 4365/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My officials are currently in discussion with colleagues from OFMdFM to determine how we can use the Social Protection Fund to assist households in fuel poverty.

Housing Points

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to review the allocation of housing points to increase the points that are awarded to people who have left the armed forces.

(AQW 4435/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials from my Department and the Housing Executive are currently carrying out an examination of the Housing Selection Scheme to ensure that the Scheme remains fit for purpose. While there are no plans at present to increase the number of points awarded to people who have left the armed forces, the work to date has identified an aspect of the Scheme that has the potential to prevent ex-service personnel who have been based in Northern Ireland from applying for social housing here. I have asked my officials to ensure that any such barriers in the Scheme are removed.

Green New Deal

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the proposed Green New Deal.

(AQW 4464/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Green New Deal is a proposal for carbon reduction through energy efficiency improvements to domestic properties. A Cross Departmental Group which includes my department, DETI and DFP are in the process of examining options for the delivery of the programme.

The Green New Deal Group provided a business proposal for the delivery of Green New Deal to my department on 14 October 2011 and followed this up with a presentation of their proposal to the Cross Departmental Group on 19 October 2011.

The Cross Departmental Group is currently developing a full economic appraisal to examine different models for the delivery of a programme to support improving the energy efficiency of domestic building stock in Northern Ireland and have agreed to consider the Green New Deal Group's business proposal as one of the options within the business case.

Housing Benefit: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of housing benefit in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 4465/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing Benefit costs in 2010/11 amounted to £595.3 million. This information is routinely published in the Department's Annual Resource Accounts.

Ballymoney: Double Glazing

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in the Ballymoney area might benefit from the installation of double glazing as a result of the Programme for Government.

(AQW 4684/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

Following the consultation period and in anticipation of agreement to the draft Programme for Government, an extensive survey programme will be initiated to establish the number of Housing Executive dwellings that require double glazing. The Housing Executive will then draft a programme to ensure that double glazing is installed in all homes by the end of 2015.

An External Cyclical Maintenance scheme commenced this year in the Housing Executive's Ballymoney District Office area to 388 dwellings which included window replacement.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Vending Machines

Mr Dallat asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the number of food or drink vending machines in Parliament Buildings; and (ii) the revenue raised by each machine in the last twelve months.

(AQW 4102/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) There are currently, as of 8th November 2011, 8 vending machines in Parliament Buildings (5 x drinks and 3 x confectionery). The vending machines are sourced, managed and operated by Eurest as part of the support services contract and are located as follows;

Floor	Room/ Tea Point	Vending		
		Details	Drinks	Confectionery
Second	267	Glass fronted confectionery vending machine (4 rows of 5 bays for crisps and 2 rows of 10 bays for confectionery) and Coca Cola can vending machine	2	2
	286	Glass fronted confectionery vending machine (3 rows of 3 bays for crisps and 3 rows of 6 bays for confectionery) and Coca Cola can vending machine		
Third	Across from 301	Glass fronted confectionery vending machine (3 rows of 3 bays for crisps and 3 rows of 6 bays for confectionery) and glass fronted soft drinks vending machine (5 rows of 9 bays)	2	1
	389	Glass fronted soft drinks vending machine (5 rows of 9 bays)		
Fourth	433	Glass fronted soft drinks vending machine (5 rows of 9 bays)	1	0
Totals			5	3

- (ii) The revenue raised by each machine in the last twelve months, November 2010 to October 2011 is set out in the table in the page below. It should be noted that these figures include 2 vending machines (1x drinks, 1x confectionery) that were located in Annexe C. With the relocation of staff from Annexe C to Parliament Buildings, it was decided to remove the drinks machine completely, and to relocate the other vending machine (confectionery) to Parliament Building, however this was not implemented until November 2011;

	Annexe C Confectionery	Annex C Drinks	Room 267 Drinks	Room 286 Confectionery	Room 286 Drinks	Room 301 Drinks	Room 301 Confectionery	Room 389 Drinks	Room 433 Drinks	
Nov-10	£114.60	£168.35	£48.50	£167.15	£86.10	£66.75	£143.90	£77.00	£98.40	
Dec-10	£138.60	£99.55	£25.80	£200.70	£108.60	£39.10	£150.40	£66.40	£131.10	
Jan-11	£48.20	£129.00	£35.40	£80.65	£77.20	£42.85	£98.40	£62.10	£89.80	
Feb-11	£114.10	£113.50	£80.20	£240.40	£124.10	£74.80	£197.00	£108.10	£113.45	
Mar-11	£83.15	£136.05	£95.15	£313.60	£139.35	£129.90	£202.85	£109.45	£120.95	
Apr-11	£62.35	£14.30	£4.00	£7.00	£28.70	£0	£91.10	£40.15	£66.30	
May-11	£90.30	£184.55	£22.25	£86.95	£52.60	£42.90	£145.20	£86.85	£88.85	
Jun-11	£135.35	£133.90	£49.70	£264.35	£118.85	£39.55	£179.60	£165.75	£115.40	
Jul-11	£77.75	£95.35	£42.60	£150.30	£70.25	£17.90	£92.25	£92.15	£81.00	
Aug-11	£63.20	£102.45	£39.25	£155.40	£80.70	£22.20	£62.05	£59.40	£100.00	
Sep-11	£132.60	£77.90	£55.50	£232.75	£87.35	£106.00	£125.05	£41.10	£124.55	

	Annexe C Confec- tionery	Annex C Drinks	Room 267 Drinks	Room 286 Confec- tionery	Room 286 Drinks	Room 301 Drinks	Room 301 Confec- tionery	Room 389 Drinks	Room 433 Drinks	
Oct-11	£17.00	£29.70	£45.85	£230.80	£131.10	£146.45	£156.50	£52.40	£46.85	
	£1,077.20	£1,284.60	£544.20	£2,130.05	£1,104.90	£728.40	£1,644.30	£960.85	£1,176.65	Total Vending Sales: £10,651.15

Invoice Reminders

Mr Wells asked the Assembly Commission why the Finance Office no longer accepts invoice reminders which are included in Office Cost Allowance claims submitted by MLAs.

(AQW 4331/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Following the introduction of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Members' Expenditure) Determination 2010 on 13 December 2010, the Commission introduced a revised Financial Support for Members Handbook. The Handbook was distributed to all Members on 14 March 2011.

While the new Handbook introduced a number of changes, many of the existing administrative requirements, particularly with regard to the submission of claims, were maintained as these were deemed by the Commission to still be appropriate. The requirement to submit original invoices with Office Cost Expenditure (OCE) claims and the exclusion of a supplier's statement as acceptable proof of purchase or service delivery except in extenuating circumstances are not new rules; these have been in place from the earlier Handbook issued in October 2006. This is a practice that is operated across many parts of the public sector and is designed to help to prevent a duplicate payment being made on both a statement and on the original invoice (if the original invoice is subsequently found and presented for payment).

Paragraph 10.4.4 of the Handbook states that "statements are not acceptable except in extenuating circumstances". Therefore, the current Handbook recognises that circumstances will occasionally arise whereby the presentation of an original invoice might not be possible. In these circumstances, the Finance Office will seek to resolve the matter (by, for example, obtaining supporting documentation from the supplier) whilst ensuring that the Commission's guidance contained in the Handbook is applied in a consistent and equitable manner for all Members.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 2 December 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

(AQO 376/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) attracted 288 written responses and included a wealth of views and material gathered from 11 public meetings and 15 targeted sectoral meetings. Those were in addition to the information that was collected through the omnibus survey. Our priority now is to achieve political consensus on the range of issues that will enable a final document and an associated high-level action plan to be published. To that end, all parties represented on the Executive have nominated members to the cross-party working group. That group has been meeting weekly since Tuesday 27 September.

The public consultation's purpose was to garner wider opinion on the draft proposals, to enable all points of view to be considered and to draft the final version of the policy. The individual responses and the consultation analysis will inform the group's work plan over the coming weeks as it seeks to agree on a strategic direction against each of the themes that have emerged.

We expect that the final programme and an associated action plan will be published in early 2012.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

(AQO 381/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) attracted 288 written responses and included a wealth of views and material gathered from 11 public meetings and 15 targeted sectoral meetings. Those were in addition to the information that was collected through the omnibus survey. Our priority now is to achieve political consensus on the range of issues that will enable a final document and an associated high-level action plan to be published. To that end, all parties represented on the Executive have nominated members to the cross-party working group. That group has been meeting weekly since Tuesday 27 September.

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We expect that the final programme and an associated action plan will be published in early 2012.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the contribution that the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will make to a shared education system.

(AQO 500/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The aim of the Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is to bring about real changes for people and places across our society. The Strategy aims to recognise and support the aspirations of the very many people who wish to see change permeate through all aspects of everyday life.

We held public consultations inviting everyone to put forward their views. The consultation included 11 public meetings and 15 sectoral events. A specific meeting with the Education sector was held on 7 October 2010 at Clifton House, Belfast. A wide range of representatives attended the event, including those from the controlled, integrated and maintained elements of the sector.

The quality of engagement; the feedback received; and constructive dialogue that took place during the consultation period reflected clearly the importance of this policy initiative.

Our priority now is to achieve political consensus on the range of issues that will enable a final document and an associated high-level action plan to be published. To that end, all parties represented on the Executive have nominated members to the cross-party working group. That group has been meeting weekly since Tuesday 27 September.

The public consultation's purpose was to garner wider opinion on the draft proposals, to enable all points of view to be considered and to draft the final version of the policy. The individual responses and the consultation analysis will inform the group's work plan over the coming weeks as it seeks to agree on a strategic direction against each of the themes that have emerged.

We expect that the final programme and an associated action plan will be published in early 2012.

Fermanagh Flooding Taskforce

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the measures outlined in the cross-departmental report by the Fermanagh Flooding Taskforce.

(AQW 3809/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The recommendations of the Fermanagh Flooding Taskforce fall to a number of departments and agencies to progress.

The Minister for Regional Development has advised that the recommendation to deliver a substantial £1.165 million programme of works to raise many parts of the road network in Fermanagh above previous flood levels was successfully completed within the 2010/11 financial year, with 57 hollows where flooding had occurred removed on 40 different roads. The positive impact and benefits of this work has been clearly demonstrated during the recent flooding event.

In addition, Northern Ireland Water commissioned a substantial capital project to increase the resilience of the Killyhevlin Water Treatment Works to flooding from high water levels in Lough Erne. This project will provide protection from flood levels similar to those experienced in November 2009 and is expected to be completed before the end of 2011. Physical flood defences are already in place and civil construction of the emergency pumping station is complete.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has confirmed that the Rivers Agency is working with the Electricity Supply Board to examine options for improvement to the operational regime governing the management of the Erne system to reduce flood risk. The first stage of this work, to model the Erne system, is currently being procured following receipt of funding and is due for completion next year. If changes to the operating regime are recommended there will be a need for consultation to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to influence any changes. The Lough Erne Management Co-ordination Committee will be engaged in this process.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has also advised that Rivers Agency and Roads Service have co-operated closely to provide a pumped system at Derrychara Link to alleviate flooding in that area in the event of high lough levels. Rivers Agency has also completed works on the Killynure Lough drain to further help contain flows.

The recommendation for an education and awareness programme to inform the local community, including school children, about flooding in the Fermanagh area and how to deal with it is also being progressed. The Rivers Agency assisted with the production of a public information leaflet on the Lough Erne System providing information on preparing for a flood, and has provided marker boards at bridges to facilitate the public monitoring of levels. In addition, the Western Education and Library Board has established a working group to investigate existing resources that might be used to inform school children in the area. The group aims to complete this work by December 2011.

More generally, organisations involved in the response to and recovery from the November 2009 flooding in Fermanagh have reported that they have reviewed and developed their contingency plans in order to enhance their response capabilities in the event of any future serious flooding that may occur. Those responsible for the delivery of essential services to the local community in Fermanagh have similarly developed their plans to better protect the provision of these services to those areas affected by serious flooding.

Bill of Rights

Mr Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the proposals to create a Bill of Rights.

(AQO 614/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In line with the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and Article 69(7) of the NI Act 1998, the Secretary of State for NI invited the Human Rights Commission, "to consult on the scope for defining in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of NI, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience".

These additional rights were, "to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and – taken together with the ECHR – to constitute a Bill of Rights for NI".

As part of the St Andrews Agreement in 2006, the UK Government committed to the setting up of a forum to help build consensus on a Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights Forum was inaugurated in December 2006 and chaired by Chris Sidoti, an international human rights lawyer. Its role was to provide advice to the NI Human Rights Commission on a Bill of Rights here.

The Bill of Rights Forum completed its report on 31 March 2008 and the NI Human Rights Commission submitted its advice on a Bill of Rights to the Secretary of State on 10 December 2008. The UK Government published its paper 'A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland: Next Steps' for consultation from 30 November 2009 and 31 March 2010 and the consultation responses were published in December 2010.

As part of a separate process, the UK Government is considering the creation of a UK Bill of Rights. Earlier this year, the Lord Chancellor wrote to us to advise that the UK Government was setting up a Commission on a UK Bill of Rights and an advisory panel to the Commission made up of two representatives from each of the devolved administrations. The Commission has now been set up and we are considering who our nominees to the advisory panel should be. The advisory panel members and Ministers here will assess the implications of any UK Bill of Rights for this devolved administration while proposals are being developed and following publication of the Commission's advice to the UK Government.

Freedom of Information Report 2010

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) why their Department's Freedom of Information Report 2010 was published on their Department's website without a press release being issued to alert the public to its publication; and (ii) whether a press release had been issued in previous years.

(AQW 4419/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department is under no obligation to publish an FOI Annual Report; however, it does so proactively on behalf of all Executive Departments. The 2010 Report was published in the same manner as the previous year – no press release was issued and no hard copies printed.

Freedom of Information Report 2010

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when their Department's Freedom of Information Report 2010 was (i) finalised; and (ii) posted on their Department's website.

(AQW 4422/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The FOI Annual Report 2010 was finalised on 6 September 2011, and posted on the OFMDFM website on 20 September 2011.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why there has been a 10 percent drop, between 2005 and 2010, in the number of responses to Freedom of Information requests which provided the full information requested.

(AQW 4485/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Requests for information are examined individually to determine whether information, if held, should be disclosed fully or partially or withheld. The outcome will depend on the nature and scope of the request, whether exemptions apply and, if appropriate, public interest considerations. When withholding information, public authorities must issue a refusal notice explaining the authority's decision. The notice must also inform the requester about the appeals process, including the right to complain to the Information Commissioner.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the success of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People since the office was established.

(AQO 730/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We commissioned an independent review last year to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the Commissioner, within the legislative terms set out in The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

In December 2010, the report concluded, on the basis of the available evidence, that the rationale for establishing the Commissioner for Children and Young People was still valid. It also concluded that the role of the Commissioner continues to be best achieved through a separate independent arms length body, providing both advice and challenge on children's rights issues.

The report did identify some positive results including the range of policy and research material which had been developed, the active engagement of the Commissioner in awareness raising activities to raise the profile of the organisation and children's rights and the impact on the lives of individual children and young people. The report also raised a number of concerns which we have been working closely with the Commissioner on to progress and address.

The report recognised that the role of the Commissioner seven years on is still evolving and that there was now an opportunity to reshape and reprioritise the activities associated with the post. In that light, we continue to work closely with the Commissioner

to ensure the maximum effectiveness and efficiency of the Office in addressing the wide range of needs and rights of our children and young people.

North/South Bodies

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made towards the establishment of more North/South bodies.

(AQW 4697/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This issue is a matter for consideration as part of a Review established under the St Andrews Agreement which is being taken forward under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) with the following Terms of Reference:

- (i.) examine objectively the efficiency and value for money of the existing Implementation Bodies;
- (ii.) examine objectively the case for additional bodies and areas of co-operation within the NSMC where mutual benefit would be derived; and
- (iii.) input into the work on the identification of a suitable substitute for the proposed Lights Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.

At its 13th Plenary meeting, which was held in Armagh on 18 November 2011, the NSMC agreed that a number of proposals to advance the first element of the Review would be discussed at the next round of NSMC meetings in sectoral format with a view to decisions being taken at the NSMC Plenary meeting in June 2012.

As indicated in the Joint Communiqué issued following the meeting, a way forward on the other elements of the Review was also agreed. This will include consultation within the Executive and within the Irish Government; discussion at the NSMC Institutional meeting in Spring 2012; and final proposals agreed at the NSMC Plenary meeting in June 2012.

In accordance with the statutory provisions, we will report to the Assembly on 29th November 2011 on the decisions taken at the 13th NSMC Plenary meeting. Any decisions following the June 2012 NSMC Plenary meeting will also be reported to the Assembly.

Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016 is being reviewed; and if so, to provide details of this review.

(AQW 4762/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There is no plan to review the Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-16.

Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the on-going work in relation to developing the next action plan for the implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016.

(AQW 4763/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The future delivery of the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People and the structures and processes needed to support this are currently being reviewed by Junior Ministers and will be discussed at the next meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People.

They plan to discuss how we can work collaboratively to progress key issues through a new strategy action plan in order to meet our commitments under the overarching Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

We shall also continue to engage with our departmental colleagues to ensure the Action Plan is focused and relevant to the needs of the sector.

Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the last action plan for the implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016 ended in March 2011, when the next action plan will be made available for consultation.

(AQW 4766/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is planned that the consultation for the next Action Plan will take place early next year.

Poverty Forum

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide details of (i) the date on which the Ministerial-led Poverty Forum was established; (ii) how many members make up the Forum; (iii) what political parties are represented; (iv) the minutes of the meetings held; and (v) the date of the next meeting.

(AQW 4792/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum was established and met just the once in March 2007 during direct rule.

The Forum was re-established on 2 June 2010 under the joint chairmanship of OFMDFM Junior Ministers and has since met on two further occasions, 3 March 2011 and 27 October 2011.

There are a total of 28 Forum members. Membership consists of representatives from each government department, the major voluntary and community sector organisations and arms length bodies and an academic. Political parties are not represented on the Forum.

Minutes of the meetings have not yet been made public as matters discussed can relate to policy still under development.

The next meeting of the Forum is scheduled to take place in January 2012.

Programme for Government

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the evaluation of the Programme for Government against the 2011-15 budget.

(AQW 4849/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government (PfG) (2011-15) which was published on 17 November 2011 represents a visible commitment by the Executive to address the issues facing the economy. In this way it will provide the groundwork for economic and social recovery.

The PfG has been developed taking into account the Budget settlement and the financial constraints which government departments face at this time. The commitments in the PfG have been developed to ensure that they are both challenging and achievable within the existing resource envelope.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list all the current public contracts within her Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender.

(AQW 4212/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Attached at Annex A is a list of the current DARD public contracts including details to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender.

This list includes those contracts that were awarded through DFP's Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), which is my Department's Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE), and those which have been reported by my business areas as having been awarded directly.

It should be noted that this list excludes shared contracts awarded by CPD on behalf of all NICS departments, including for example, security, catering, and cleaning contracts.

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
LESLIE McGUICKIN	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-13
T.K. Contracts (Ireland) Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-13
RDA LOWRY	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-13
Digit Site Services Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-13
Scottish Woodlands Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-13
Stephen Colhoun Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Dec-13
Scottish Woodlands Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Dec-13
Brown Bros	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
LESLIE McGUICKIN	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
william doherty Construction	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Watersq Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
R HEATRICK LTD	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
R & M GREENKEEPER LTD	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Mc Manus Contracts Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Maurice Flynn & Sons Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
MILLIGAN BROS. LTD	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
GF Wilson	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Conwell Contracts UK Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Boyd Bros	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Arnold Walker Contracts	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
A G Wilson	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
A & T Contracts	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Harold Graham Building Contractor & Plant Hire	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
D A Contracts	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Farm Woodlands Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Scottish Woodlands Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Pat Mc Sorley	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
M&H Tree and Garden Services	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Gardiner Farm And Forest Services	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Farm Woodlands Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Gardiner Farm And Forest Services	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Pat Mc Sorley	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
T.K. Contracts (Ireland) Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Pat Mc Sorley	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Farm Woodlands Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
M&H Tree and Garden Services	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-12
Pat Mc Sorley	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Dec-13
Kevin Harrold Contracts Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Dec-13
Riada Signs	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Oct-14
Soil Association	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-15
Coillte Teoranta	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	May-16
Moore Timber	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Moore Timber	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
J Thompson & sons	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-12
Northern Lift Trucks (NI) Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
A Hyde Farm Feeds	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-12
Fane Valley	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Nov-11
Landscapeing Centre Lintied	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-14
A E Kenwell & Sons	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-12
J Thompson & sons	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-12
S H COLEMAN (GLARRYFORD) LTD	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-12
Compass Group UK & Ireland	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	August 2014 - 2016
JOHN MCELDERRY M&T LIMITED	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Saville Machinery	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
STEPHEN MOORE FARM MACHINERY	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Sep-14
Reiser UK Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Zwick Testing Machines Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
MultiVibe Systems Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
PricewaterhouseCoopers	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
PARITY SOLUTIONS LIMITED	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Pira International	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Scantech	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Systech Instruments	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
Versaperm Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Matrix Management Consultancy	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
SpotOn Software Pvt. Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
ASG	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Insituform Environmental Techniques	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Kelly Engineering (IR) Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Contract ends Aug 2012
McAllister Bros Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Contract ends Jan 2012
JBA Consulting	By Invitation Only	4 Year Framework runs to 2014
RPS Consulting Engineers	By Invitation Only	4 Year Framework runs to 2014
AECOM	By Invitation Only	4 Year Framework runs to 2014
Blenheim Systems Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
RPS Consulting Engineers	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
bc plant jcb limited*	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
FGS McClure Watters	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
BC Plant JCB Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
OTT Hydrometry Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Contract end Feb 2013
RPS Consulting Engineers	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
Environmental Techniques Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Contract ends June 2013
JBA Consulting	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
STAR-APIC	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
ABP Newry	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Glenfarm Holdings Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
OCS Group UK Ltd T/A: Cannon	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	May-14
W.D. MEATS LTD	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Jun-12
Rural Development Council	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Clogrennane Lime Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Dec-12
Bio-Rad Laboratories Ltd. UK	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Coote's (Concrete Products) Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
ROBINSON QUARRY MASTERS	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
TRACEY CONCRETE LIMITED	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Peter Quinn Consultancy Services Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
BDO STOY HAYWARD	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Cogent Management Consulting LLP	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
FGS McClure Watters	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
KPMG	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Edentrillick and Budore Quarries Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
Armagh City Quarries	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Coote's (Concrete Products) Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Harold Graham Building Contractor & Plant Hire	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Northstone (NI) Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Patrick Bradley Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Peter Fitzpatrick Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
R J MITTEN & SONS	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
ROBINSON QUARRY MASTERS	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
W J & H Crozier	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
loughran rock industries	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Collen Brothers (Quarries)	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Tullyraine Quarries Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	March 2012-13
Goldblatt McGuigan	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Pierce Communications	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
Deloitte	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Rural Community Network	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Countryside Services Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
PricewaterhouseCoopers	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Baltic Workboats AS	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
FGS McClure Watters	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Komatsu Forest	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
DGP	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Mar-12
KPMG	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Deloitte	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Deloitte	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
FPM Accountants LLP	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Mentor Economic Developments Limited	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
BSS	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
Goldblatt McGuigan	By Invitation Only	NICS retendering exercise Jan 2012
Hewlett-Packard Limited - Northern Ireland	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Laboratory Supplies & Instruments Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
VWR International	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Deloitte	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
EXCLAIM	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
JBS Group	By Invitation Only	Not currently being considered for retender
McAvoy Offsite Solutions	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
DD Consultancy Ltd	By Invitation Only	NICS retendering exercise Jan 2012

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
SureCloud Ltd	By Invitation Only	NICS retendering exercise Jan 2012
RPS Group	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Feb-12
Northgate Managed Services	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
RW Pierce Security Print Solutions Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Apr-14
Salford GIS Limited	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
IT Guarded Ltd	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	NICS retendering exercise Jan 2012
Open Sky Data Sytems	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not to be Retendered
Rural Development Council	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Not currently being considered for retender
Pierce	By Invitation Only	Mar-14
FGS McClure Watters	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
BDO STOY HAYWARD	By Invitation Only	Not to be Retendered
Computacenter (UK) Ltd.	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Dec-11
Event Exhibition & Display	Invitation To Tender Open to All Suppliers	Mar-13
Sopra Group	By Invitation Only	NICS retendering exercise Jan 2012
Forest Service Response		
Advanced Parking Solutions.	Invite to Tender	17/08/2015
ELM FORESTRY + LANDSCAPING LTD.	Invite to Tender	Apr-12
L G Hygiene LTD	Invite to Tender	May-12
Veterinary Service Response		
LP Associates	Invited to Tender	After 31 December 2011
CIPFA NI	Invited to Tender	01-Jun-13
Service Delivery Group Response		
William Bell Tractors	Letter to main providers	N/A
Stewarts Commercial	Letter to main providers	Jul-12
ACSR	Letter to main providers	Jul-12
Rural Generation	Letter to main providers (11) plus biomass network	Sep-12
Northern Bio Energy	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
Graham Wilson	Letter to main providers	Sep-13
RD Services	Letter to main providers	Nov-12
Still to be determined	Letter to main providers	Nov-12
Still to be determined	Letter to main providers	Nov-12
Still to be determined	Letter to main providers	N/A
Trafalgar Scientific	Letter to main providers	May-12
Davidson and Hardy Ltd	Letter to main providers	May-12
Premier Scientific	Letter to main providers	May-12
Fannin	Letter to main providers	May-12
Annalab	Letter to main providers	May-12
VWR International	Letter to main providers	May-12
Mason Technology	Letter to main providers	May-12
Ulster Anaesthetics	Letter to main providers	May-12
Focus Scientific	Letter to main providers	May-12
Solutions	Letter to main providers	May-12

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
Premier Scientific	Letter to main providers	May-12
Annalab	Letter to main providers	May-12
Puley Equipment	Letter to main providers	May-12
Lennox Laboratory	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
Lab Supplies	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
Rotronic	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
Instrument UK	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
Embroiderus Ireland	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
Clare-Maria Campbell	Letter to main providers	Apr-12
Anthony Jones	Letter to main providers	Apr-12
A&R Armstrong, P Croft	Letter to main providers	Sep-12
A&R Armstrong	Letter to main providers	N/A
Greenacre Composting	Letter to main providers	Oct-13
Woodbine Skips	Letter to main providers	Dec-12
AtLast! Training Ltd	Letter to main providers	N/A
Total Treecare Co	Letter to main providers	N/A
Central Services Group Response		
Act Now,	Invitations to tender	Dec-12
Mullan Training,	Invitations to tender	Apr-12
SureSkills,	Invitations to tender	Apr-12
SureSkills,	Invitations to tender	Apr-12
BT Training Solutions,	Invitations to tender	Apr-12
Rosepark Training Services,	Invitations to tender	Not to be retendered
Farmdata Ltd	Single Tender Action	Mar-12
SAC Commercial Ltd	Single Tender Action	Mar-12
GMAC	Invitations to tender	Sep-12
Civia	Invitations to tender	Feb-12
EOS	Invitations to tender	Sep-12
JBA Consulting	Single Tender Action	Jun-12
Mapinfo (CDR Group)	Single Tender Action	Apr-12
Capita	Single Tender Action	Mar-15
Novosco	Invitations to tender	Jan-12
QuestMark Ltd	Invitations to tender	Mar-12
QuestMark Ltd	Invitations to tender	Mar-12
Regional Services Ltd	Single Tender Action	Mar-12
Geosolutions	Single Tender Action	Feb-12
BSS - Lotus	Invitations to tender	Apr-12
Singularity ISB	Single Tender Action	Aug-11
Star Apic	Single Tender Action	Apr-12
SirsiDynix	Single Tender Action	Dec-12
ComTag Ltd	Single Tender Action	Mar-12
Mead & Co	Single Tender Action	Dec-11
Inphoactive	Single Tender Action	Apr-12
SPSS	Single Tender Action	Jun-12
Singularity	Single Tender Action	Sep-11
Palisade	Invitations to tender	Jan-12
RMA	Single Tender Action	Sep-12
Steria	Single Tender Action	Mar-12
Northgate	Single Tender Action	Oct-12

Supplier	How was it advertised?	When is it to be retendered?
CareTower	Invitations to tender	Mar-14
Quest	Invitations to tender	Jun-12
STAR APIC	Single Tender Action	Sep-12
British Telecom	Invitations to tender	May-13
Northgate	Single Tender Action	Mar-12
Comodo	Invitations to tender	Oct-12
Korec	Invitations to tender	Feb-12
Kelway	Invitations to tender	Sep-13
Niavac	Invitations to tender	Mar-12
HP	Invitations to tender	Feb-16
QuestMark Ltd	Invitations to tender	Mar-12
Kelway	Invitations to tender	Mar-12
Satisnet	Invitations to tender	Mar-14
Quest Software	Invitations to tender	Mar-13
Business Scientific Services	Invitations to tender	Nov-12
Access Information Security Ltd	Invitations to tender	Feb-13
Survey Monkey	Invitations to tender	Sep-12
Farmwizard	Invitations to tender	Sep-11
Central Policy Group Response		
Seazonen Ltd	Single Tender Action	To be re-evaluated annually, retendered if possible in 3 years
Thistle Marine	Invited to tender/Letter	Oct-15
Richard McLernon	Invited to tender/Letter	Aug-15
VH Electrics	Invited to tender/Letter	Jun-15
Jim Coulter	Invited to tender/Letter	Dec-13
CEFAS	Single Tender Action	Mar-14
Rivers Agency Response		
Met Office	Single Tender Action	2012
UKCMFS	Single Tender Action	2012
Kisters	Single Tender Action	2012
OTT Hydrometry	Single Tender Action	2012
Kisters	Single Tender Action	2012
Environment Agency	Single Tender Action	2012
Environment Agency	Single Tender Action	2012
Wolters Kluwer	Single Tender Action	2012
Wallingford Software Ltd	Single Tender Action	2012
Systems Network	Single Tender Action	2013
STAR-Apic	Single Tender Action	2012
Pentagon	Single Tender Action	2012
CSSP	Single Tender Action	2012
CIVICA	Single Tender Action	2012
CADS	Single Tender Action	2012

Forestry Grant Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers in the North Down area have (i) applied for; and (ii) received funding under a forestry grant scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4397/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the last three years, 11 new applicants applied to plant trees in this constituency and all received approval. Over the same period, 10 people received payments for planting trees. A yearly breakdown is shown in the table below. The table

shows that more people received funding in some years compared with applications approved in that year. This is because an approved application is valid for two years after the date of approval.

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Applications	2	3	6
Received Funding	5	2	3

In addition, there are approximately 15 people who received an annual farm woodland premium payment over this three year period.

DARD: Air Travel

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total cost incurred by her Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4409/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The total cost incurred by officials in my Department on air travel for the period January to December 2010 is as follows:

Heathrow Airport	Other Great Britain Airports	Total
£48,970	£63,623	£112,593

Rural Support

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the role that Rural Support plays in supporting mental health and wellbeing.

(AQW 4413/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rural Support plays an important role in supporting mental health and wellbeing issues amongst the rural community and this is recognised through our ongoing funding commitment to the charity.

The Rural Support provision of a helpline and support service to farming and rural families across the north to help deal with stress, mental ill-health or emotional distress is all the more important given the difficult economic climate. Rural support are working closely with my officials and other statutory and community organisations to ensure that their services are known as widely as possible and I commend all their work.

DARD: Health Checks

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to her Department's proposal to work with the Public Health Agency to roll-out community based health checks in rural areas, (i) whether she has consulted Rural Support; and (ii) if Rural Support will be involved if rural dwellers are to be given advice on a range of health matters, including mental health.

(AQW 4415/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD officials are currently scoping and developing a number of potential initiatives and schemes as part of the package of interventions to tackle rural poverty and isolation over the current budget period. One such initiative would include community based health checks in rural areas and Rural Support has attended and contributed positively to the steering group established to develop this initiative.

Whilst the initiative is still under development and subject to approvals I can tell you that it is planned that Rural Support will be involved.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to specify the machinery which is considered ineligible for the (i) Diversification into Non-Agricultural Activities; (ii) Business Creation and Development; and (iii) Basic Services for the Economy and Rural Population elements of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQW 4433/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under the Rural Development Programme all machinery can be considered eligible unless it falls into the category of mobile infrastructure or agricultural equipment for example a minibus, quad bike, tractor etc. The exception to this is bespoke designed and built mobile infrastructure that is not available 'off the shelf' for example in a showroom, catalogue, internet or other retail source.

Flooding: Belcoo

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to prevent a recurrence of the flooding incident on 17 October 2011 in Belcoo, County Fermanagh.

(AQW 4506/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The flooding incident on 17 October 2011 occurred at the Lattone Road on the outskirts of Belcoo village adjacent to a designated watercourse within the meaning of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973, known to Rivers Agency as the Lurgan River, MW540 and upstream of a road bridge. It is difficult to be definitive about the exact cause of the flooding on 17 October 2011 however exceptionally heavy rainfall at this time may have produced flows which exceeded the capacity of the bridge which was built by DRD Roads Service to the appropriate design standard in 2003. My Rivers Agency inspected the watercourse for any signs of blockages following the flooding but found nothing of any significance. There is a sewage pumping station at this location which may have had an influence on flooding in the area. There is also a small weir just above the bridge if removed, it may improve the venting capacity of the bridge and my Rivers Agency is currently investigating this option. As this is a designated watercourse Rivers Agency will continue to periodically inspect and when required maintain it to ensure the free flow of water.

Flooding: Farmland in Upper Bann

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to prevent the flooding of farmland in Upper Bann.

(AQW 4513/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Upper Bann area has watercourses which are designated under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 and for which my Rivers Agency has a maintenance responsibility. Watercourses are categorised as "urban" or "rural". Generally urban open watercourses are inspected and maintained on a yearly basis, while rural watercourses are inspected and maintained at least every six years. If significant weed, bush or tree growth or significant localised accumulations of silt are encountered in watercourses during routine maintenance inspections, consideration is given to their removal in order that a free flow of water in the watercourses can be preserved. Such maintenance works must be carried out in accordance with any relevant environmental legislation. My Rivers Agency also has responsibility for maintaining the level of Lough Neagh within a stipulated control range in so far as climatic conditions allow.

Many undesignated open watercourses are also located in the Upper Bann area and the maintenance responsibility for these rests with the riparian occupiers of the land.

It should be recognised however that it is not possible to prevent all flooding, particularly of farmland which often constitutes the natural floodplain of rivers and watercourses

Rural Development Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total budget allocated for the Rural Development Programme in the (i) North East Cluster; (ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West Cluster; (iii) South West Action Rural Development Cluster; (iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas Cluster; (v) Down Rural Area Partnership Cluster; (vi) Grow South Antrim Cluster; and (vii) Lagan Rural Partnership for 2007-2013.

(AQW 4565/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The total budget allocated by cluster for Axis 3 of the NIRDP 2007-2013 is as follows:

(i)	North East Region	£13,181,300
(ii)	Assisting Rural Communities North West	£18,484,112
(iii)	South West Action Rural Development	£20,522,227
(iv)	Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas	£16,731,839
(v)	Down Rural Area Partnership	£13,498,066
(vi)	Grow South Antrim Cluster	£8,890,899
(vii)	Lagan Rural Partnership	£8,691,556

Rural Development Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the administrative costs allocated for the Rural Development Programme in the (i) North East Cluster; (ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West Cluster; (iii) South West Action Rural Development Cluster; (iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas Cluster; (v) Down Rural Area Partnership Cluster; (vi) Grow South Antrim Cluster; and (vii) Lagan Rural Partnership for 2007-2013.

(AQW 4568/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Joint Council Committees are permitted to utilise, by way of an administration budget, an amount equivalent to 20% of the funds disbursed on project grants. This means that for every £5 pounds of project spend £1 may be used towards administration. However Joint Council Committees in partnership with their LAGs may, with prudent financial management, assign a lesser percentage to administration and a greater amount to project expenditure.

To date the administration expenditure is as follows:

Cluster	Project Spend	Admin Spend	Equivalent % of Admin against Project spend
(i) NER	£1.94m	£0.87m	44.8
(ii) ARC	£1.79m	£1.26m	70.7
(iii) SWARD	£2.67m	£1.51m	56.7
(iv) SOAR	£1.33m	£0.97m	73.2
(v) DRAP	£1.06m	£0.84m	79.9
(vi) GROW	£1.04m	£0.53m	51.2
(vii) LRP	£0.61m	£0.61m	101.3

Rural Development Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department remains committed to the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013; and whether any attempts will be made by her Department to halt any further calls for applications being submitted.

(AQW 4570/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can assure the member that both myself and my Department remain totally committed to the NIRD 2007-2013. The member will be aware that on 14th June 2011, I gave a commitment to the Agriculture Committee that the NIRD money would be spent in its entirety and that I would not allow any money to be sent back to Europe. That commitment remains in place today.

I can also confirm that my Department has not halted any further calls for applications being submitted. However, officials are working with each cluster to assist in clearing their backlogs of applications prior to opening. This will help clusters to urgently process some 556 applications worth £34.6m currently awaiting full assessment. It is vitally important to clear this backlog in order to establish an accurate picture of the current commitment.

As Managing Authority for Axis 3, my Department takes its responsibilities seriously and, at times, may instruct council clusters to suspend the opening of calls for applications particularly at times where there are large numbers of applications to clear.

DARD: Sports

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding her Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4639/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not funded projects where the specific aim is the development and promotion of any sport. Financial support under these terms would not be eligible under DARD rural funding Programmes. However, through Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme and my Tackling Poverty initiative, some rural community facilities have been funded where sports organisations have acted as the lead project sponsor. These projects were eligible under the respective terms and conditions of these programmes and designed primarily to benefit the wider rural community by affording local people the opportunity to access facilities and undertake a vast range of community activities at suitable venues in their areas.

Rivers Agency

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Rivers Agency has drawn up a list towns and villages that are at risk of flooding; and if so, to provide a copy of this list.

(AQW 4678/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Communicating flood risk is a complex topic and it is not a matter of simply drawing up a list of towns and villages that may be at risk. The accepted best practice uses flood maps to identify risk areas. The Strategic Flood Map for the north was jointly launched in November 2008 by my predecessor, Michelle Gildernew and the then Minister of Environment, Minister Wilson. This publically available map shows the areas which may be inundated by a river or tidal flood event.

As a direct response to recent flooding I have also asked my Rivers Agency to include the map layers showing the risk from surface water, that is flooding caused by rainfall which exceeds the capability of the ground or manmade drainage systems, and to update the historical flood outlines. This will be made available to the public during the 2nd week in December.

I also plan to make public the areas of potential significant flood risk as identified by the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment, required by the EU Floods Directive, early in the New Year. These areas will then be subject to further study in order to map the risk in detail which will inform the development of objectives and measures to manage the flood risk.

Bovine TB

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why targets have not been set out within the Programme for Government for the reduction and eradication of Bovine TB.

(AQW 4721/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We are now in a good position to eradicate Brucellosis within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

I am also committed to the eradication of TB and I will continue to work towards this end, but eradication will not be achievable within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

We have a rigorous programme for TB eradication in place and considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.15% at 30 September 2011. The equivalent herd incidence rates are 8.72% in England, 6.58% in Wales and 4.65% in the south. Our TB eradication programme is approved by the EU Commission, which is vital to safeguard our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry.

While the progress made in reducing the incidence of TB is encouraging, we continue to seek more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of bovine TB from cattle to cattle and between wildlife and cattle. TB is a very complex, multi-factorial and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and science still does not know with certainty how the disease is spread between cattle and between wildlife and cattle and what can be done to prevent its spread. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We are engaging with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the Rural Development Programme, to detail (i) how much has been paid out to claimants under each Axis, and parts of the Axis; and (ii) the cost of administering each Axis, and parts of the Axis, to date.

(AQW 4725/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Payments to claimants under each Axis of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 up to 31 October 2011 are listed below.

Total Axis 1 payments = £14.64m

Split by measure (parts of Axis):

- 1.1 Vocational Training and Information Actions = £1.5m
- 1.2 Adding Value to Agriculture and Forestry Products Improving Marketing Capability = £5.3m
- 1.3 Modernisation of Agricultural Holdings = £6.73m
- 1.3 Short Rotation Coppice = £0.87m
- 1.4 Supply Chain Development Programme = £0.24m

The above figures exclude delivery agent costs (see part ii).

Total Axis 2 payments = £240.22m

Split by measure (parts of Axis):

- 2.1 Less-Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowances = £114.4m
- 2.2 Agri-Environment Programme = £119.5m
- 2.3 Woodland Grant Scheme = £2.43m
- 2.3 Farm Woodland Premium Scheme = £3.89m

Total Axis 3 payments = £10.003m

Split by measure (parts of Axis):

- 3.1 Diversification into Non-Agricultural Activities = £3.177m
- 3.2 Support for Business Creation and Development = £3.145m
- 3.3 Encouragement of Tourism Activities = £2.048m
- 3.4 Basic Services for the Economy and Rural Population = £1.098m
- 3.5 Village Renewal and Development = £0.448m
- 3.6 Conservation and Upgrading the Rural Heritage = £0.087m

The above figures exclude council clusters' administration costs (see part ii).

- (ii) Administration costs under each Axis of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 up to 31 October 2011 are listed below. It is to be noted that administration costs are not provided for those measures wholly or partly delivered by DARD as it is not feasible to disaggregate such costs from general DARD administrative expenditure.

Axis 1 (cash payments to delivery agent) = £2.87m

Split by measure (parts of Axis):

- 1.1 = £1.37m
- 1.2 = NIL
- 1.3 = £1.1m
- 1.4 = £0.4m

Axis 2 = NIL

Axis 3 (cash payments to council clusters) = £6.096m

Administrative costs are not available for individual measures within Axis 3 as such information is not required within the delivery contract.

DARD: Assembly Questions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the average cost to her Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4735/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is not possible to provide the information requested as my Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been spent on tackling bovine tuberculosis in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4742/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has spent the following amounts on tackling bovine tuberculosis in each of the last 5 years:-

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£22,758,922	£21,235,717	£23,560,115	£23,047,144	£22,096,909

Ulster Wildlife Trust

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding her Department, or its agencies, have awarded to the Ulster Wildlife Trust in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 4745/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below reflects the amount of funding awarded to the Ulster Wildlife Trust from my Department during the last five (financial) years.

Period	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Funding	£19,230	£30,689	£6,659	£31,927	£18,727

Bovine TB

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that one of the key commitments in the Draft Programme for Government is to eradicate Brucellosis in cattle by March 2014, why there are no targets or commitments on the eradication of Bovine TB included in the document.

(AQW 4799/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We are now in a good position to eradicate Brucellosis within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

I am also committed to the eradication of TB and I will continue to work towards this end, but eradication will not be achievable within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

We have a rigorous programme for TB eradication in place and considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.15% at 30 September 2011. The

equivalent herd incidence rates are 8.72% in England, 6.58% in Wales and 4.65% in the south. Our TB eradication programme is approved by the EU Commission, which is vital to safeguard our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry.

While the progress made in reducing the incidence of TB is encouraging, we continue to seek more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of bovine TB from cattle to cattle and between wildlife and cattle. TB is a very complex, multi-factorial and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and science still does not know with certainty how the disease is spread between cattle and between wildlife and cattle and what can be done to prevent its spread. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We are engaging with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Veterinary Surgeons: Herd Tests

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has paid to veterinary surgeons for conducting herd tests in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency; and how many veterinary surgeons conducted herd tests during this period.

(AQW 4802/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This information is not available by constituency but has been broken down by Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO). The information provided below relates to bovine tuberculosis tests carried out by Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVP) in each of the last 3 years:-

DVO	2008/09 (£)	2009/10 (£)	2010/11 (£)
Armagh	646,358.15	650,144.62	642,686.84
Ballymena	393,480.25	426,544.70	424,219.01
Coleraine	705,901.87	729,819.74	810,578.18
Dungannon	643,576.28	611,668.03	648,135.51
Enniskillen	737,896.00	712,400.44	714,749.38
Mallusk (previously Larne)	459,915.54	511,587.43	540,695.22
Londonderry	224,143.17	222,147.26	234,486.76
Newry	1,095,607.68	1,236,230.67	1,064,713.23
Newtownards	529,765.39	540,590.47	657,270.45
Omagh	807,860.33	759,998.49	741,674.50
Total	6,244,504.66	6,401,131.85	6,479,209.08
Number of PVPs	329	340	333

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to combat Bovine Tuberculosis.

(AQW 4806/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We have a rigorous programme for TB eradication in place. We have achieved EU Commission approval for this programme for 2010 and 2011 and formal approval for our 2012 programme is expected in the near future. This eradication programme is vital in safeguarding our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. Having EU Commission approval also enables DARD to draw down €5 million co-funding from Europe for 2010 and €4 million co-funding for 2011 to offset a proportion of the costs of the programme.

I am pleased that considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.15% at 30 September 2011. The equivalent herd incidence rates are 8.72% in England, 6.58% in Wales and 4.65% in the south. My aim is to reduce and ultimately eradicate TB in cattle here and I will continue to work towards this end.

Considerable work has been undertaken to enhance the TB eradication programme in recent years. We now remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test rather than after a third test as before. We have improved communications with Private Veterinary Practitioners and strengthened the supervision process. We have improved DARD's own delivery of TB testing through monitoring Key Performance Indicators. We also use DNA identity tags on reactors to help reduce reactor identity queries, substitution fraud and associated disease risks.

While the progress made in reducing the incidence of TB is encouraging, we continue to seek more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of bovine TB from cattle to cattle and between wildlife and cattle. TB is a very complex, multi-factorial

and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and science still does not know with certainty how the disease is spread between cattle and between wildlife and cattle and what can be done to prevent its spread. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We are engaging with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Cost of Tree Planting

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of (i) planting trees; and (ii) providing grants to other parties to plant trees, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4839/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Forest Service spent the following on planting trees over the last three financial years:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/2012 year to date
£1.1m	£1.1m	£0.48m

The following grant assistance was provided by Forest Service to private landowners during these years:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/2012
£1.4m	£1.6m	£0.55m

Also, planting native trees is one of many habitat management options that can be undertaken by agri-environment scheme participants. My Department holds records, by calendar year, of the area of native trees planted for which a management payment was made. Using this information I have provided an estimate of the total annual management payments made to scheme participants for each of the last three calendar years as follows:

2008	2009	2010
£0.68m	£0.69m	£0.69m

Ivy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial incentives her Department has in place to encourage the removal of ivy from trees where the ivy is a threat to the trees.

(AQW 4840/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Ivy is important for wildlife particularly insects, bats and birds. It provides shelter and berries for food in winter and also provides nesting and roosting sites in the spring and summer. Except for health and safety reasons it should be left untouched. Ivy is not usually a threat to trees and therefore my Department does not have any policies in place to address the destruction of trees by ivy, does not have any plans to carry out a survey of the number of trees that are under threat of destruction by ivy growth and does not offer financial incentives to remove ivy from trees.

Ivy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans are in place to carry out a survey of the number of trees that are under threat of destruction from ivy.

(AQW 4841/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to AQW 4840/11-15.

Ivy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what policies her Department has in place to address the destruction of trees by ivy.

(AQW 4842/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to AQW 4840/11-15.

Tree Planting Campaigns

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on tree planting campaigns in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4843/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Forest Service has spent the following on providing grants for tree planting in each of the last three financial years:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 year to date
£1.4m	£1.6m	£0.55m

Also, my Department holds records, by calendar year, of the area of native trees planted for which a management payment was made to agri-environment scheme participants. The estimated total annual management payments made to scheme participants for each of the last three calendar years is as follows:

2008	2009	2010
£0.68m	£0.69m	£0.69m

Tree planting has been promoted by: Forest Service and Countryside Management staff visiting landowners, DARD press releases, Balmoral Show, a targeted leaflet drop, and meetings with Councils, Government Agencies, and non-government organisations.

Horse Mussel Beds in Strangford Lough

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to protect and restore the horse mussel beds in Strangford Lough since 2007.

(AQW 4857/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This Department initially took action in 1993 to protect mussel beds introducing measures to remove fishing activity over such habitat through the Inshore Fishing Prohibition Regulations (NI) 1993, and acted to introduce a total prohibition on all mobile fishing gear in the lough since 2003 by an amendment to that Regulation. The Department maintains protection from collateral damage by divers through retention of the original 1993 prohibition on scallop diving north of Danes Rock. The Department has provided 50 % funding of The Modiolus Restoration Research project at a total cost of £1m between 2008 and 2011, receiving the final report of that project in May 2011. In 2010 the Department contracted AFBINI to conduct an appropriate assessment of the impacts of pot fishing on horse mussels which concluded that there was little effect, however in March 2011 the Department introduced two non-fishing zones over approximately 300 Hectares of mussel beds through The Strangford Lough (Sea Fisheries Exclusion Zones) Regulations (NI) 2011.

Horse Mussel Beds in Strangford Lough

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to protect and restore the horse mussel beds in Strangford Lough.

(AQW 4859/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has co-funded the Modiolus Restoration Research project conducted by QUB since 2008 and has taken delivery of the final report and recommendations in May 2011. Officials have noted the recommendations and together with colleagues in the NIEA are currently drafting a revised Modiolus restoration plan to take matters forward. I expect to be in a position to announce the content of that plan in the near future.

Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what changes were made to the Rural Development Programme to provide additional funding for a further tranche of the Farm Modernisation Programme.

(AQW 4871/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Changes to the Rural Development Programme, in response to the British Government spending review were approved by the European Commission on 19 October 2011. These changes included adjusting the Axis 2 co-financing rates to the maximum EU contribution permissible, increasing the allocation to the Less Favoured Areas scheme, reducing the allocations for agri-environment and forestry measures and taking account of exchange rate movements since the programme was approved in 2007. As a result of these changes additional funding was also added to the information and training measure and the modernisation of agricultural holdings measure, which includes the Farm Modernisation Programme.

Northern Ireland Lamb

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the differences between the quality assurance and traceability of Northern Ireland lamb and lamb from the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 4945/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the north, quality assurance of lamb is provided for via the NI Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIFQAS). The scheme is owned by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) and is funded by way of a voluntary industry levy. In the south, it is the Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme (LQAS) which is also an industry funded scheme, provided through Bord Bia.

In relation to differences between these quality assurance schemes, the NIFQAS requires lambs to have adhered to a 60 consecutive day residency period on quality assured farm/farms prior to slaughter, while LQAS requires lambs to have adhered to a 42 day residency period.

There is also some variation between the schemes' certification requirements and also between standards with regards to environmental care aspects and animal traceability, identification and records.

While there are some differences between both schemes, it should be noted that the principles behind both quality assurance schemes are the same, with both setting out requirements for best practice in beef and lamb production. Both schemes are also accredited to EN45011, which is the standard for the European accreditation of bodies who are involved in certification of the various scheme requirements.

The traceability of live sheep, both here and in the south, is based on Council Regulation (EC) 21/2004. The systems are based on the principle of individual traceability and include: identification of animals on the holding of birth, a register on each holding, a movement document for each movement, and a central database of all holdings and sheep movements.

The main differences are (1) all sheep here must bear two identical identifiers including an electronic device before they are moved off the holding of birth, while the south operate a derogation whereby lambs can be moved to slaughter bearing a single conventional tag; and (2) when sheep are moved here all identifiers are read electronically and recorded on the keeper's behalf by a Central Point of Recording (for example, a market or meat plant), while in the south identification numbers are recorded by the keeper.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Local Action Groups, Joint Council Committees and the Rural Development Programme are no longer calling for funding applications.
(AQW 4959/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that my Department has not halted any further calls for applications being submitted. Officials are working with each cluster to assist in clearing their backlogs of applications prior to opening for new applications. This has resulted in the clearance of just over £2m of applications in the past 2 weeks and I can confirm that to date 2 clusters have cleared their backlogs to the point where they can now open again for applications. There are some 556 applications worth £34.6m currently awaiting full assessment. It is vitally important to clear this backlog in order to establish an accurate picture of the current commitment.

As Managing Authority for Axis 3, my Department takes its responsibilities seriously and, at times, may ask council clusters to suspend the opening of calls for applications particularly at times where there are large numbers of applications to clear.

Agrifoods: Strategic Plan

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work has taken place on the development of a strategic plan for the agri-foods sector, and to what effect; and when this strategy will be published.
(AQW 4991/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Focus on Food Strategy was published in June 2010. It was developed in conjunction with the Industry Advisory Panel and Invest NI. These arrangements have also given the industry unprecedented access to government ensuring that policy development meets the needs of the industry. A number of actions have been taken forward within the various sub groups which were established under the strategy, for example the recent Innovation Stakeholder event which I opened at Loughry campus.

Focus on Food provides a good foundation for the next phase of work, which is to develop this into a longer-term strategy up to 2020. In line with the findings of an independent review of the agri-food support structures, DARD and DETI/Invest NI are now in the process of establishing a Food Strategy Board whose role will be to develop this strategic plan.

The appointment of the Food Strategy Board independent chairperson is in progress and it is intended that the Board will become operational in the New Year. Given that these structures are not yet in place, it is not possible for me to indicate when the new strategic plan will be published. However, I do see this as an important piece of work and will want to meet with the FSB on its appointment so that this work commences without delay.

I look forward to working with the FSB and Executive colleagues in doing what I can do help the industry plan and implement its growth strategy, reflecting the economic performance of the food industry here.

Food Strategy Board

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the budget available for the (i) formation; and (ii) year-on-year operation of the Food Strategy Board.
(AQW 5028/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In relation to the formation of the Food Strategy Board, the anticipated budget is approximately £5,000. This represents the cost incurred of recruiting an independent chair. This cost will be split equally between DARD and Invest NI.

In relation to the year-on-year operation of the Board, the Chair will receive an honorarium of £500 per day for approximately 5 days per month (up to 60 days per annum). This cost will also be split equally between DARD and Invest NI, while Board members shall be unpaid positions.

Food Strategy Board

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the extent and nature of the industry engagement and involvement during the process of formulating proposals for a Food Strategy Board.

(AQW 5041/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Support arrangements for policy development for the agri-food industry are currently comprised of an Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) and an Industry Advisory Panel (IAP) made up of key industry stakeholders.

With the agreement of the IAP, my predecessor and the DETI Minister commissioned an independent review of these structures which recommended the establishment of a body which would bring together agri-food industry and Government representatives. The IAP was represented on the project management board of the review and the findings and recommendations of the report were presented to, and agreed by, the IAP.

We continue to keep the IAP fully informed of progress with regard to the establishment of the Food Strategy Board structures and I would like to pay tribute to the industry representatives for their commitment during this process and for working with us in the best interests of the sector.

I very much look forward to continuing to work constructively with the industry in helping to develop a longer-term strategy for its continued growth through the work of the Food Strategy Board.

Bee Population

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the impact of colony collapse on the bee population; and whether her Department has directed any resources to address this issue.

(AQW 5047/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no evidence that Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) is present in the north of Ireland, the island of Ireland or GB. My Department's inspectors check managed bees for notifiable diseases and pests, and any unusual colony losses are investigated to try to ascertain the cause. As there is no evidence of CCD here, no current resources are directed to address this specific issue. However, locally, through the implementation of the Strategy for the Sustainability of the Honey Bee, beekeepers and officials are working in partnership to protect and improve the health of honey bees and this will include consideration of all issues affecting bees and beekeepers.

Animal Welfare Regulations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many convictions have been secured against farmers for failing to adhere to animal welfare regulations in each of the last four years.

(AQW 5055/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Dates of Conviction	Number of persons convicted	Number of offences
25/11/2007-24/11/2008	10	43
25/11/2008-24/11/2009	8	23
25/11/2009-24/11/2010	13	56
25/11/2010-25/11/2011	6	20
Total	37	142

Maximising Access Project

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an analysis of the Maximising Access to Benefits Scheme and whether she intends to continue this scheme.

(AQO 844/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Maximising Access project facilitates a cross-departmental co-ordinated service to maximise access to benefits, grants and local services to support rural dwellers living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Using grassroots information the project sought to identify the most vulnerable rural households in each of the targeted super output areas. Trained enablers visited the households, completed a detailed household and personal questionnaire and provided a range of information to occupants regarding locally available services. From the information gathered householders were in turn referred to various agencies and departments and provided with follow-up support to assist in accessing the grant, benefit or service that they were entitled to.

It is clear to me that this has been a very successful scheme in delivering on the primary aim of assisting our most vulnerable rural households but also as an example of statutory and community coming together in partnership to maximise impact. The

independent evaluation of this first phase of the scheme strongly supports this assessment. Following this and the completion of a positive business case I have agreed the continuation of the scheme over the current budget period. Officials are working with the Public Health Agency to roll out the newly named Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA) project, encompassing the learning to date.

Rural Crime

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice she is providing to farmers on combating the recent increase in rural crime.

(AQO 846/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I understand the difficulties increasing levels of crime causes for rural communities and sympathise with them. However, the remit of DARD does not include responsibility for providing advice to farmers or the wider rural community on how to combat crime. While this responsibility rests with the Department of Justice, I would encourage farmers to participate in local initiatives by Community Safety Partnerships to prevent rural crime. I am aware of a number of local initiatives that have been taken forward by the Police Service of NI (PSNI). I believe these have worked well and have been well received by local communities. My Department has also worked closely with officials from the Department of Justice, to ensure that appropriate actions to address rural crime, have been included in the Rural White Paper.

I have also asked for a meeting with the Department of Justice and the PSNI and I am aware that the PSNI are working closely with An Garda Síochána in dealing with crime that impacts on rural communities in the border areas.

Flooding

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent serious flooding incidents, what plans she is putting in place to allow the Rivers Agency to be more proactive in informing people, who own property on, or near, a flood plain, when there is an increased risk of flooding.

(AQO 847/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As a direct response to the recent flood events, which highlighted to me the potential for nature to impact on people's lives, I have asked my Rivers Agency to update the strategic flood map. This is to make as much up to date information available to the public as possible, and to ensure the data covers the risks from rivers, the sea and surface water, as well as showing those areas for which historical flood information has been collated. I am pleased to announce that it is my intention to make this information available from the second week in December on the Departmental Website.

This builds on the Strategic Flood Map (NI) – Rivers and the Sea which was jointly launched by my predecessor Michelle Gildernew and the then Minister of the Environment Mr Wilson in November 2008.

In addition I have also asked that Rivers Agency review the other information they have available to identify opportunities which could provide early alerts of any developing flood situation.

Brucellosis

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress is being made in reducing the incidences of brucellosis.

(AQO 848/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to state that the confirmed herd incidence rate for brucellosis here is down to 0.044% at 31 July 2011.

This is a remarkable achievement. Indeed this figure may well have been much lower had it not been for 2 infection hot-spots developing in 2010, which were attributable in part to suspected reckless or fraudulent activities by some herdkeepers.

Eradication of brucellosis by 2014, which is one of our objectives in the draft Programme for Government, will subsequently allow us to seek EU Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF) status.

Achieving OBF status will benefit farmers from anticipated reductions in the level of routine and pre-movement testing, which represents a £7 million per year compliance cost for farmers.

It is necessary for farmers to continue to observe good biosecurity practices and report any abortions in their cattle to DARD veterinarians.

Common Agricultural Policy: Greening

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the greening element in the European Commission's proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy.

(AQO 849/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: First of all, I should point out that I totally agree that, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must deliver for the environment as well as supporting farm incomes. Indeed it already does so through Cross Compliance and our Agri-Environment Schemes. The main difficulty from the greening proposals stems from the fact that they are intended to be common across the

EU. But agricultural practices and land use varies greatly from region to region. The greening proposals are aimed at the arable sector but in the north of Ireland, the arable sector is relatively small. The impact is likely to be that arable production will shrink further, creating a move towards a grass monoculture which would be undesirable from an environmental point of view. Some of the greening proposals such as the requirement to retain permanent grassland will unnecessarily restrict farmers in their ability to shape their business according to market needs and thereby have an adverse impact on agricultural competitiveness. Another concern is that there will be a significant administrative burden both for farmers and the Department in implementing these measures.

To sum up, I am not against a CAP that delivers for the environment, but the greening proposals need considerable work to ensure that they actually deliver environmental benefits, do not hinder the development of a competitive agricultural industry and can be implemented without disproportionate cost.

Comber Potatoes

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of whether the Comber Potato will be granted Protected Geographical Indication this year by the European Commission.

(AQO 850/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Potato Stakeholder Forum's application to register "New Season Comber Potatoes/Comber Earlies" as a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) was published on the EC's official journal on 14 May 2011 to allow other Member States and third countries to comment on the application. If no comments/objections are received then "New Season Comber Potatoes/Comber Earlies" will be registered as a PGI.

You will appreciate that the timescale for the process of granting registration is entirely a matter for the Commission, however, I hope that in the coming months, "New Season Comber Potatoes/Comber Earlies" will become the North's second successful PGI.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list all the current public contracts within her Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender.

(AQW 4213/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The table below provides a list of all current public contracts within DCAL, including to whom each contract was awarded, how the contracts were advertised and when each contract is due for tender.

Current Public Contract	To whom Contract was awarded	How Contract was Advertised	When is Contract next due for Tender
NICS Irish translation service	Central Translations	CPD's website, Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and Newsletter	July 2013
Legal Fees for Enforcement court cases	Murnaghan & Fee Solicitors	eSourcingNI portal. Open to All Suppliers	July 2014
Indigenous Erne Trout Fry	EMEC	Specialised Provider Approached	March 2014
Movanagher Hatchery	R J McKelvey (Castledearg) and H & J Martin	CPD Call Off List	No renewal at contract end
Derry Live Site	Derry City Council	Specialised Provider Approached	No renewal at contract end
Photocopier Rental/Office Machinery Rental	Xerox	eSourcingNI portal -Invitation Only	3 years per piece of equipment
Facilities Management	Aramark/Vector FM	eSourcingNI portal -open to All Suppliers	July 2015
Estate Agency Services iro sale of former PRONI site at Balmoral Avenue.	Hampton Estates.	Contract awarded by LPS.	No renewal at contract end
Chroma Map Scanner Support contract	Digiscan Ltd	Specialised Provider Approached	October 2014
PRONI Public catalogue hardware	TCS Solutions Ltd	eSourcingNI portal -open to All Suppliers	August 2015

Current Public Contract	To whom Contract was awarded	How Contract was Advertised	When is Contract next due for Tender
PCP software support	CADAN Solutions Ltd	eSourcingNI portal -Invitation Only	Contract awarded in January 2009 for three years with options to extend for two further one year periods
Street Directories hosting, licence maintenance and support	Aetopia Ltd	Specialised Provider Approached	Replacement contract currently being tendered
CALM software support	Axiell Ltd	CPD Call Off List	March 2013
Exhibition	Tandem Design	eSourcingNI portal -Invitation Only	No renewal at contract end
Archival Storage	Oasis Group (McConnell Archive Storage)	CPD Call Off List	Contract awarded to August 2014, with an option to extend for two further periods of 5 years each
N.I. Web Archiving Project	The National Archives/ Internet Memory Foundation	Specialised Provider Approached	December 2011
Microfilm camera and processor maintenance: Maple 3000 Microfilm Processor s/n 974040 & ICAM 35mm Microfilm Camera s/n 208	ICAM Archive Systems	CPD Call Off List	March 2013
Titanic Quarter Exhibition Display Case	Click Netherfield Ltd	eSourcingNI portal -Invitation Only	No renewal at contract end
Supply and Maintenance of Microfilm Readers	Digital Imaging Services	eSourcingNI portal -open to All Suppliers	March 2014
Supply of Titanic Quarter Exhibition Boards / Panels	MBA Great Britain	eSourcingNI portal -Invitation Only	No renewal at contract end
Lough Erne Trout Fishery Enhancement Contract	Erne & Melvin Enhancement Company	eSourcingNI portal -Invitation Only	No renewal at contract end

Irish Language Act

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the introduction of an Irish Language Act would require cross-community support.

(AQW 4514/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The St Andrews Agreement of October 2006 committed the UK Government to: introduce an Irish Language Act based on the experience of Wales and Ireland; and to work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

I am keen to ensure that the appeal of the Irish language is broadened to include all groups in the North. I am hopeful that through meaningful and extensive stakeholder engagement about the proposals that those who are unconvinced by the need for legislation may be persuaded.

Líofa 2015

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3403/11-15, to outline the methodology by which she determined that some people have sought to portray the promotion of the Gaelic culture and the Irish language as the preserve of one section of the community.

(AQW 4520/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As previously stated I am aware that there are differing viewpoints in relation to the Irish language across the North. I am keen to broaden the appeal of Irish and ensure that it is seen as part of our shared cultural heritage. The opportunity to learn the language is open to everyone.

I hope that the Líofa campaign and future Irish language initiatives will illustrate the benefits and opportunities that learning the Irish language can bring to everyone in our society.

National Lottery

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are any opportunities for her Department to draw on funding from the National Lottery to create new community sports and play facilities.

(AQW 4731/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under current legislation Lottery Distributors are wholly responsible for the development of Lottery Programmes and the funding of projects. My Department's role is to set broad policy directions within which programmes are developed and the Department cannot therefore directly prescribe that a specific programme is created for new community and play facilities.

DCAL: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the public appointments both she and her predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4749/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The names, position and date of appointment of the individuals appointed to Public Bodies under the remit of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure since May 2007 are listed per body in Annex A attached.

Please note, the Fisheries Conservancy Board was abolished on 31st May 2009 and the functions were transferred into the Department.

ANNEX A

Public Body	Individual/Position (Appointment Date)
Armagh Observatory and Planetarium - Board of Governors	Mr William Gregory Hamilton Berry – Member (01/01/11)
Armagh Observatory and Planetarium - Management Committee	Mr Eamonn Peter Donnelly – Member (01/11/08)
	Councillor James Ignatius Shields – Member (01/11/08)
	Mr Alastair Peoples – Member (01/11/08)
	Mrs Primrose Eileen Wilson – Member (01/11/08)
	Dr Áine Downey – Member (01/07/08)
	Mrs Sue Hogg – Member (01/07/08)
	Dr Michael McKay – Member (01/01/11)
	Mr Richard Brett Hannam – Member (01/01/11)
Arts Council NI	Mrs Rosemary Kelly – Chair (01/07/07)
	Mrs Eithne Benson – Member (01/07/07)
	Mrs Katherine Bond – Member (01/07/07)
	Mrs Lucia Finnegan – Member (01/07/07)
	Mr Anthony Kennedy – Member (01/07/07)
	Mr William H C Montgomery – Member (01/07/07)
	Ms Sharon O'Connor – Member (01/07/07)
	Mr Peter Spratt – Member (01/07/07)
	Mr Raymond Fullerton – Member (01/07/07)
	Mr Damien Coyle – Vice-Chair (01/12/07)
	Professor Paul Seawright – Member (01/12/07)
	Mr Joseph Rice – Member (01/12/07)
	Mr David Irvine – Member (01/12/07)
	Mr Brian Sore – Member (01/12/07)
	Mrs Janine Walker – Member (01/12/07)
	Professor Ian Montgomery – Member (09/04/08)
Fisheries Conservancy Board	Dr Robert Hanna – Chair (01/01/08)
	Mr Mick Cory – Member (01/01/08)
	Ms Hazel Campbell – Member (01/09/08)
	Rev OP Kennedy – Member (14/10/08)
	Mr Edward Montgomery – Member (01/10/08)
	Mr David Cowan – Member (01/12/08)

Public Body	Individual/Position (Appointment Date)
	Mr Robbie Marshall – Member (15/12/08)
National Museums NI	Miss Linda Beers – Member (01/07/08)
	LT Colonel (Rtd) Reginald Harvey Bicker – Member (01/07/08)
	Dame Geraldine Keegan – Member (01/07/08)
	Mrs Wendy Osborne – Member (01/07/08)
	Mr Thomas Shaw – Member (01/07/08) – Vice-Chair (13/02/09)
	Dr Alastair Walker – Member (01/07/08)
	Mr James Neil Bodger – Member (01/07/08)
	Mr Pat Carvill – Member (01/07/08)
	Mr Joe Kelly – Member – Member (01/07/08)
	Dr John Richard Browne McMinn – Member (01/07/08)
	Mr John David William Moore (01/07/08)
	Ms Margaret Anne Peoples – Member (01/07/08)
	Dr Brian Scott – Member (01/07/08)
	Mr Daniel Harvey – Member (01/07/08) Chair (01/01/09)
NI Library Authority	Dr D S Elliott – Chair (01/12/08)
	Mr Patrick Carvill – Member (01/04/09)
	Mr Alastair James McDowell OBE – Member (01/04/09)
	Ms Jane Roberta Williams – Member (01/04/09)
	Councillor Hubert Nicholl – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Councillor Ms Evelynne Robinson – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Councillor Jim Rodgers – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Councillor Patrick Cathal Mullaghan – Member (01/08/09)
	Councillor Ms Carla Lockhart – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Councillor Samuel Cole – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Councillor Allan Ewart – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointment (28/06/11)
	Councillor Mrs Anne Brolly – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointment (28/06/11)
	Councillor Charlie Casey – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Councillor Mrs Roberta Dunlop – Member (01/08/09)
	Councillor James Ignatius Shields – Member (01/08/09) – Reappointed (28/06/11)
	Mr David Roger Dixon, MBE – Member (01/10/09)
	Mr Nigel S Macartney – Member (01/10/09)
	Ms Angela Matthews – Member (01/10/09)
	Ms Helen Elizabeth Roulston – Member (01/10/09)
NI Screen Commission	Mr Richard (Rick) Hill – Vice Chair (01/01/08) Chair (01/01/09)
	Mr Phillip Morrow – Member (01/09/07)
	Ms Mairead Regan – Member (01/09/07)
	Ms Maria McCann – Member (01/09/07)
	Mr Terry Loane – Member (01/09/07)
	Dr Roger Austin – Member (01/09/07)
	Mr Peter Quinn – Member (01/09/07)
	Mr Tim McKane – Member (01/01/08)
	Ms Ruth Helene McCance – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr James Michael Penny – Member (01/01/08)

Public Body	Individual/Position (Appointment Date)
	Ms Anne Therese Cormican – Member (01/01/08)
	Ms Kate Smith – Member (01/01/08)
	Dr Maurice Hayes – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Brian McMahon – Vice-Chair (01/04/10)
Sport NI	Mr Dominic Walsh Vice Chair (01/01/08) Chair (01/08/08)
	Dr Olive Brown – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Murray Cowan – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr John D'Arcy – Member (01/01/08)
	Ms Una Duncan – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Barry Macaulay – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Brian McCargo – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Hugh McCaughey – Member (01/01/08)
	Ms Maura Muldoon – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Danny O'Connor – Member (01/01/08)
	Councillor Jim Rodgers – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Alan Strong – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Patrick Turnbull – Member (01/01/08)
	Mr Alan Money Penny - Member (01/01/08) Vice Chair (01/10/09)
Architecture & the Built Environment – Ministerial Advisory Group	Mr Arthur Acheson – Member (01/09/07) – Chair (01/09/10)
	Mr James Donnelly – Member (01/09/10)
	Mr Andrew Gault – Member (01/09/07) – Reappointed (01/09/10)
	Mr Gerard Lynch – Member (01/09/07)
	Mr Ian McKnight – Member (01/09/07) – Reappointed (01/09/10)
	Mr Marcus Patton – Member (01/09/07) – Reappointed (01/09/10)
	Mr Wesley Strong – Member (01/09/07) – Reappointed (01/09/10)
	Mrs Diana Fitzsimons – Member (01/09/10)
	Ms Emily Smyth – Member (01/09/07) – Reappointed (01/09/10)
	Prof Hisham Elkadi – Member (01/07/08)
	Prof Barrie Todd – Chair (01/09/07)
	Prof Tom Woolley – Member (01/09/07) – Reappointed (01/09/10)
Ministerial Advisory Group for the Ulster Scots Academy	Mr Iain Carlisle – Member (24/03/11)
	Mr John Erskine – Member (24/03/11)
	Mr Alister John McReynolds – Member (24/03/11)
	Mr Tom Scott – Member (24/03/11)
	Dr Caroline Baraniuk – Member (24/03/11)
	Dr Ivan Herbison – Member (24/03/11)
	Dr David Hume – Member (24/03/11)
	Dr John McCavitt – Member (24/03/11)
	Dr William Beattie Smith – Chair (24/03/11)
World Police & Fire Games Ltd 2013	Mr Peter Craig – Member (28/02/11)
	Mr Edgar Jardine – Member (28/02/11)
	Mr Brian McCargo – Member (28/02/11)
	Mr Duncan McCausland – Chair (28/02/11)
	Mr Max Murray – Member (28/02/11)
	Mr Michael Murray – Member (28/02/11)
	Mr Dominic Walsh – Member (28/02/11)

Public Body	Individual/Position (Appointment Date)
	Mrs Kathryn Thompson – Member (28/02/11)
	Cllr Pat McCarthy – Member (28/02/11)
	Cllr Gavin Robinson – Member (28/02/11)
	Ms Cynthia Smith – Member (30/05/11)
	Mr William Humphrey – Member (01/06/11)
	Mr Alistair Finlay – Member (01/06/11)
	Ms Judith Gillespie – Chair (26/09/11)
	Ms Cathy Gallagher – Member (01/11/11)
	Mr Adam Newton – Member (10/11/11)

Erne Eel Fishery

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that other EU fisheries, including Lough Neagh, are re-stocking with elver eels, why the Erne Eel Fishery has not been allowed to re-stock with elver eels; and how this situation can be resolved. (AQW 4867/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL works with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) to operate a trap and truck policy to overcome high levels of glass eel mortality caused by the turbines at the hydro electric station at Ballyshannon. The trapped glass eels are released throughout Upper and Lower Lough Erne, where they have the opportunity to grow and mature. When mature they are trapped again for transporting around the dams to contribute to spawner escapement to sea.

The European Commission would not have approved the North West Eel Management Plan if it had involved the stocking of the rapidly dwindling European glass eel resource into Lough Erne, as there are two dams forming significant barriers to their escapement as mature adults.

There are no significant barriers to migration of eels through the Lower Bann system to and from Lough Neagh.

Erne Eel Fishing

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why Lough Erne is currently closed to fishing for eels. (AQW 4868/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The North West Eel Management Plan (NWEMP) was approved by the European Commission on 4 March 2010. The NWEMP stipulated that the eel fishery on Lough Erne must demonstrate at least 40% escapement of sexually mature silver eels to spawn at sea. Escapement data confirmed that this figure was not being met and consequently the eel fishery in Lough Erne had to be closed in 2010.

Failure to comply with the requirements of the North West Eel Management Plan could result in infraction proceedings being taken against Britain as a Member State by the European Commission.

Sports Projects: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding that her Department has earmarked for sports projects in the North Down area in the 2011-15 budgetary period. (AQW 4927/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of exchequer funding. Sport NI has earmarked £11,232,303 in the 2011-15 budgetary period for sporting projects in the North Down area. A breakdown of this figure is provided below:

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
50m Pool	£7,000,000	£3,843,834	£385,137	-	£11,228,971
Awards for Sport	£3,332	-	-	-	£3,322
Totals	£7,003,332	£3,843,834	£385,137	-	£11,232,303

Furthermore, Sport NI has allocated a budget of £10.25m for its Community Capital Programme during the current CSR period. A total of 141 applications for funding were received under this programme, three of which are from the North Down area. Applications under this programme are currently being considered by Sport NI.

Arts Projects: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding that her Department has earmarked for arts projects in the North Down area in the 2011-15 budgetary period. (AQW 4928/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's funding in support of the arts is disbursed by the Arts Council through a number of funding programmes. This funding is not allocated on the basis of area but on the merits of the application to the relevant funding programme.

It is not possible to provide details of future funding in the North Down area, but the current Arts Council budget figure for 2011/12, and the indicative allocations to the Arts Council for each subsequent year of the Budget period are as follows:

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total resource budget	14.4	13.2	12.8	12.9
Total Capital Budget	3.8	0.6	0.5	0.5

NB. Above figures exclude the Creative Industries Innovation Fund allocation.

In this current year (2011/12) the Arts Council has awarded funding of £283,748 in the North Down area.

North Down Borough Council also received £4,000 from the Department's Community Festivals Fund, some of which may relate to arts type projects.

Protestant and Orange Bands

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has provided to bands from the Protestant and Orange community (i) in total; and (ii) for instruments and tuition; in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4960/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding in support of bands in the North of Ireland is disbursed through the Arts Council and the Ulster Scots Agency.

Funding awarded by the Arts Council through its Musical Instruments for Bands Programme for the purchase of instruments in each of the last 3 years broken down by constituency is shown in Annex A.

Funding awarded by the Arts Council through the Small Grants Programme for band related activity (including musical instruments and tuition) in each of the last 3 years broken down by constituency is shown in Annex B.

The Arts Council has not made a judgment on these bands as "Protestant or Orange"

Funding awarded by the Ulster Scots Agency through its Financial Assistance Scheme is not held in the format requested but the link below to the Agency's website will provide information on all grant recipients from 2008 – 2011

<http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/community-projects/projects-funded-by-the-agency/>

My Department also allocates funding to bands through the Community Festivals Fund administered by the local councils. Information is not held at constituency level but I have listed the funding provided by Councils to bands considered to be from the Protestant and Orange community at Annex C. If you require a further breakdown, you should contact the councils directly.

Annex A

Musical Instruments for Bands Programme

Constituency	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast East		4,583	5,000
Belfast North	4,900	4,878	
Belfast South			4,253
Belfast West		4,658	
East Antrim		4,266	5,000
East Londonderry	9,492		17,579
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	50,364	15,000	
Foyle			3,000
Lagan Valley	5,000	4,889	19,940
Mid Ulster	32,345	25,619	34,684
Newry and Armagh		5,000	5,000
North Antrim	10,000	5,000	19,129
North Down		4,845	
South Antrim	3,750	4,680	
South Down	4,999	16,404	29,737

Constituency	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Strangford	9,999		4,973
Upper Bann	3,750		8,643
West Tyrone	14,712	5,000	8,190
Total	149,311	104,822	203,761

NB. Does not make a judgment on these bands as "Protestant or Orange"

Annex B

Small Grants Programme (formerly Awards for All*)

Constituency	2008/09*	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast West		2,500	
East Londonderry	800		
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	9,370	3,725	
Foyle		10,000	
Newry and Armagh		4,000	4,220
South Antrim			1,200
South Down	2,200		
Upper Bann			7,531
West Tyrone	3,650.		
Total	16,020	20,225	12,951

NB. Does not make a judgment on these bands as "Protestant or Orange"

Annex C

Community Festivals Fund

Council	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Antrim		2,250	
Ballymena		1,439	1,590
Ballymoney	1,470	1,260	1,430
Castlereagh	3,000	830	1,525
Coleraine		506	
Derry		1,500	3,000
Down		12,000	8,000
Magherafelt	400		1,500
Moyle	300		771
Newry & Mourne		915	
North Down	6,000		
Omagh	1,000		1,550
Strabane			900
TOTAL	12,170	20,700	20,276

NB. It is not possible to be certain that figures refer to exclusively protestant bands in all instances

Special Olympic Groups in Rural Areas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department provides for small Special Olympic groups in rural areas which are trying to become established.

(AQW 4961/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is providing support to Special Olympics Ulster as part of a cross-departmental funding package covering the 4-year period 2011/12 to 2014/15. The funding that is being provided across the five departments involved totals £2.296m, with my Department's contribution being £0.459m. This funding is being provided to assist the development of Special Olympics throughout the north of Ireland, including the establishment of new clubs.

Libraries: Terminal Statistics

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) issue; and (ii) public access terminal statistics in each library, for each month between April 2010 and November 2011, broken down by (a) adult fiction; (b) adult non-fiction; (c) children's fiction; and (d) children's non-fiction issues.

(AQW 4992/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has provided me with the following information:

- (i) Issues broken down by (a) adult fiction; (b) adult non-fiction; (c) children's fiction; and (d) children's non-fiction are enclosed for April 2010 to March 2011 at Annex A and April 2011 to October 2011 at Annex B.
- (ii) Libraries NI has informed me that Public access terminal statistics in each library are unable to be recorded into categories (a), (b), (c) and (d).

The total public access terminal statistics for each Library are enclosed for April 2010 to March 2011 at Annex C and April 2011 to October 2011 at Annex D.

November 2011 figures are not yet available.

Annex A

Issues:

(i) April 2010- March 2011

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Antrim Library	Apr	2,819	1,306	2,667	453	327	7,572	72,829
	May	2,344	1,205	2,364	398	296	6,607	
	Jun	2,297	1,036	2,210	350	241	6,134	
	Jul	2,637	1,222	3,046	471	347	7,723	
	Aug	2,196	1,093	2,459	359	283	6,390	
	Sep	2,279	1,089	2,191	328	245	6,132	
	Oct	2,148	1,123	2,334	368	219	6,192	
	Nov	2,316	969	2,178	317	219	5,999	
	Dec	1,689	548	1,162	145	120	3,664	
	Jan	2,083	867	1,902	336	175	5,363	
	Feb	1,977	986	2,083	369	202	5,617	
	Mar	1,973	947	1,961	289	266	5,436	
Ardoyne Library	Apr	620	191	479	74	36	1,400	17,437
	May	542	146	423	56	21	1,188	
	Jun	543	181	568	73	29	1,394	
	Jul	739	218	706	96	49	1,808	
	Aug	641	209	549	67	46	1,512	
	Sep	582	231	601	77	39	1,530	
	Oct	640	249	632	61	57	1,639	
	Nov	548	200	532	60	36	1,376	
	Dec	521	138	249	46	28	982	
	Jan	620	173	492	63	24	1,372	
	Feb	602	201	668	47	71	1,589	
	Mar	632	204	694	77	40	1,647	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Armagh Library	Apr	2,266	854	2,021	258	224	5,623	63,042
	May	1,977	800	1,822	319	216	5,134	
	Jun	2,165	736	1,895	294	190	5,280	
	Jul	2,305	814	2,840	449	278	6,686	
	Aug	2,105	873	2,446	401	285	6,110	
	Sep	2,070	889	2,005	348	237	5,549	
	Oct	1,994	821	1,963	333	187	5,298	
	Nov	1,726	728	1,899	321	292	4,966	
	Dec	1,605	513	929	159	142	3,348	
	Jan	1,815	751	1,604	283	190	4,643	
	Feb	1,872	857	1,802	271	262	5,064	
	Mar	2,080	873	1,847	280	261	5,341	
Ballycastle Library	Apr	981	490	924	236	183	2,814	31,627
	May	870	358	829	139	143	2,339	
	Jun	898	439	801	149	148	2,435	
	Jul	1,083	557	1,288	210	198	3,336	
	Aug	1,013	393	1,151	165	193	2,915	
	Sep	948	531	1,032	218	150	2,879	
	Oct	820	492	1,167	246	211	2,936	
	Nov	935	458	1,054	183	182	2,812	
	Dec	824	280	500	77	152	1,833	
	Jan	937	427	694	157	139	2,354	
	Feb	875	465	760	135	125	2,360	
	Mar	1,012	493	831	105	173	2,614	
Ballyclare Library	Apr	1,464	532	1,681	360	169	4,206	46,129
	May	1,323	442	1,552	356	70	3,743	
	Jun	1,507	457	1,573	333	107	3,977	
	Jul	1,593	555	2,041	365	158	4,712	
	Aug	1,461	554	1,807	251	150	4,223	
	Sep	1,399	519	1,642	269	172	4,001	
	Oct	1,381	512	1,728	279	171	4,071	
	Nov	1,386	415	1,550	228	186	3,765	
	Dec	1,128	241	982	86	138	2,575	
	Jan	1,211	435	1,357	226	124	3,353	
	Feb	1,101	446	1,484	239	139	3,409	
	Mar	1,461	512	1,687	272	162	4,094	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Ballyhackamore Library	Apr	1,925	602	1,843	242	138	4,750	59,813
	May	1,643	536	1,708	230	119	4,236	
	Jun	1,909	521	1,638	235	146	4,449	
	Jul	2,145	608	2,319	269	169	5,510	
	Aug	2,019	638	2,413	291	175	5,536	
	Sep	1,905	684	2,387	336	179	5,491	
	Oct	1,995	620	2,522	306	226	5,669	
	Nov	1,786	681	2,220	307	172	5,166	
	Dec	1,552	417	1,151	160	159	3,439	
	Jan	1,811	574	2,163	324	210	5,082	
	Feb	1,758	585	2,213	254	206	5,016	
	Mar	1,903	555	2,462	339	210	5,469	
Ballymena Central Library	Apr	3,347	1,362	3,239	445	431	8,824	112,343
	May	3,211	1,210	3,218	393	378	8,410	
	Jun	3,622	1,305	3,508	350	447	9,232	
	Jul	4,015	1,609	5,145	458	498	11,725	
	Aug	3,872	1,543	4,617	474	515	11,021	
	Sep	3,812	1,627	3,986	439	422	10,286	
	Oct	3,421	1,655	4,155	500	426	10,157	
	Nov	3,469	1,523	3,262	290	373	8,917	
	Dec	2,680	924	1,835	197	315	5,951	
	Jan	3,501	1,505	3,139	346	453	8,944	
	Feb	3,550	1,538	3,397	363	471	9,319	
	Mar	3,644	1,623	3,424	359	507	9,557	
Ballymoney Library	Apr	1,702	628	1,743	282	175	4,530	57,103
	May	1,713	623	1,877	252	178	4,643	
	Jun	1,756	651	1,724	281	182	4,594	
	Jul	2,310	796	2,467	340	292	6,205	
	Aug	1,901	704	2,260	277	264	5,406	
	Sep	1,880	725	1,958	317	243	5,123	
	Oct	1,845	620	1,979	280	215	4,939	
	Nov	1,758	617	1,601	218	165	4,359	
	Dec	1,531	431	889	101	133	3,085	
	Jan	1,625	647	1,520	243	176	4,211	
	Feb	1,625	752	1,896	310	200	4,783	
	Mar	1,832	791	1,993	365	244	5,225	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Ballynahinch Library	Apr	873	315	1,002	171	20	2,381	24,589
	May	885	292	998	239	21	2,435	
	Jun	916	287	1,076	181	16	2,476	
	Jul	1,025	317	1,311	170	9	2,832	
	Aug	873	337	1,281	125	14	2,630	
	Sep	852	347	1,188	205	17	2,609	
	Oct	928	309	1,780	310	20	3,347	
	Nov	829	280	1,730	313	69	3,221	
	Dec	694	185	850	171	36	1,936	
	Jan	153	33	116	14	5	321	
	Feb	87	18	102	7	4	218	
	Mar	102	21	49	8	3	183	
Banbridge Library	Apr	2,159	775	2,806	423	252	6,415	72,139
	May	1,891	683	2,250	363	193	5,380	
	Jun	1,944	694	2,388	357	168	5,551	
	Jul	2,235	846	3,233	492	239	7,045	
	Aug	2,055	875	3,201	431	279	6,841	
	Sep	2,047	874	2,822	458	255	6,456	
	Oct	1,999	867	3,104	641	275	6,886	
	Nov	1,755	725	3,043	459	259	6,241	
	Dec	1,495	440	1,235	203	128	3,501	
	Jan	1,810	750	2,518	499	236	5,813	
	Feb	1,697	793	2,503	502	203	5,698	
	Mar	2,054	735	2,817	464	242	6,312	
Bangor Carnegie Library	Apr	7,210	2,636	7,901	1,219	243	19,209	205,324
	May	6,390	1,840	6,561	1,110	273	16,174	
	Jun	6,936	2,114	6,392	998	420	16,860	
	Jul	7,657	2,580	8,714	1,262	456	20,669	
	Aug	7,088	2,524	8,432	1,277	416	19,737	
	Sep	6,658	2,367	7,047	1,095	384	17,551	
	Oct	6,802	2,375	8,151	1,178	375	18,881	
	Nov	6,243	2,090	6,570	977	349	16,229	
	Dec	4,954	1,401	3,886	506	274	11,021	
	Jan	6,039	2,018	6,250	1,133	450	15,890	
	Feb	5,825	2,077	6,718	1,098	493	16,211	
	Mar	6,685	2,089	6,534	1,105	479	16,892	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Bessbrook Library	Apr	711	190	739	197	42	1,879	29,102
	May	642	175	783	192	47	1,839	
	Jun	704	213	807	139	40	1,903	
	Jul	756	176	967	181	49	2,129	
	Aug	638	175	843	183	82	1,921	
	Sep	798	140	740	168	75	1,921	
	Oct	683	144	985	231	81	2,124	
	Nov	702	177	1,030	242	75	2,226	
	Dec	528	107	479	144	45	1,303	
	Jan	1,406	390	1,467	383	124	3,770	
	Feb	1,590	407	1,460	375	148	3,980	
	Mar	1,580	339	1,737	329	122	4,107	
Broughshane Library	Apr	619	196	515	66	24	1,420	18,018
	May	579	163	615	67	15	1,439	
	Jun	603	145	508	71	9	1,336	
	Jul	717	152	786	85	22	1,762	
	Aug	610	131	623	56	23	1,443	
	Sep	657	142	709	76	20	1,604	
	Oct	630	148	674	76	22	1,550	
	Nov	610	133	687	87	28	1,545	
	Dec	566	85	413	42	17	1,123	
	Jan	649	122	557	70	16	1,414	
	Feb	684	129	743	73	23	1,652	
	Mar	701	145	751	111	22	1,730	
Brownlow Library	Apr	1,189	454	1,403	278	64	3,388	38,908
	May	1,168	417	1,409	300	90	3,384	
	Jun	1,196	394	1,438	281	75	3,384	
	Jul	1,185	435	1,807	364	92	3,883	
	Aug	1,164	362	1,762	333	97	3,718	
	Sep	1,113	439	1,652	334	101	3,639	
	Oct	1,019	415	1,559	342	90	3,425	
	Nov	1,039	384	1,294	305	72	3,094	
	Dec	829	241	723	124	50	1,967	
	Jan	912	314	1,235	282	70	2,813	
	Feb	1,017	345	1,274	230	74	2,940	
	Mar	1,048	400	1,462	264	99	3,273	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Carnlough Library	Apr	289	98	129	21	6	543	10,248
	May	330	79	123	18	3	553	
	Jun	290	133	153	37	6	619	
	Jul	340	173	247	88	8	856	
	Aug	419	124	135	37	13	728	
	Sep	287	130	112	30	5	564	
	Oct	363	183	172	26	4	748	
	Nov	371	171	218	33	15	808	
	Dec	274	98	108	28	18	526	
	Jan	355	207	144	22	16	744	
	Feb	589	297	388	115	27	1,416	
	Mar	540	319	1,030	215	39	2,143	
Carrickfergus Library	Apr	2,887	1,215	1,645	267	372	6,386	70,941
	May	2,788	1,044	1,747	351	336	6,266	
	Jun	2,545	767	1,092	161	172	4,737	
	Jul	3,166	985	1,883	289	253	6,576	
	Aug	2,943	990	1,704	191	213	6,041	
	Sep	3,027	967	1,577	211	157	5,939	
	Oct	2,947	1,043	1,719	259	250	6,218	
	Nov	2,947	1,037	1,460	157	286	5,887	
	Dec	2,346	698	889	81	217	4,231	
	Jan	2,880	1,052	1,308	203	303	5,746	
	Feb	2,629	955	1,344	201	311	5,440	
	Mar	3,040	1,358	2,378	335	363	7,474	
Carryduff Library	Apr	96	52	86	9	8	251	18,588
	May	400	179	746	113	6	1,444	
	Jun	470	230	779	115	25	1,619	
	Jul	553	229	843	128	24	1,777	
	Aug	444	228	685	126	12	1,495	
	Sep	490	262	1,012	190	17	1,971	
	Oct	458	232	968	186	18	1,862	
	Nov	412	230	987	191	37	1,857	
	Dec	364	131	357	46	27	925	
	Jan	555	216	733	134	34	1,672	
	Feb	528	236	865	117	40	1,786	
	Mar	498	193	1,014	185	39	1,929	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Castledearg Library	Apr	618	154	945	165	93	1,975	21,900
	May	459	138	775	129	49	1,550	
	Jun	503	193	673	108	44	1,521	
	Jul	529	207	1,038	114	79	1,967	
	Aug	585	196	1,169	144	66	2,160	
	Sep	578	218	1,156	239	55	2,246	
	Oct	541	256	1,047	203	65	2,112	
	Nov	495	199	883	194	41	1,812	
	Dec	440	106	467	43	52	1,108	
	Jan	466	202	759	164	49	1,640	
	Feb	451	223	890	181	81	1,826	
	Mar	472	223	979	238	71	1,983	
Castlewellan Library	Apr	547	190	693	179	30	1,639	21,875
	May	566	184	837	296	30	1,913	
	Jun	440	158	737	156	31	1,522	
	Jul	532	213	877	195	48	1,865	
	Aug	431	123	733	143	23	1,453	
	Sep	493	201	872	164	19	1,749	
	Oct	583	220	1,158	293	26	2,280	
	Nov	573	214	1,131	224	53	2,195	
	Dec	439	110	598	118	57	1,322	
	Jan	552	191	948	245	79	2,015	
	Feb	494	205	976	259	77	2,011	
	Mar	487	177	927	244	76	1,911	
Central Lending Library Belfast	Apr	2,373	1,198	609	146	208	4,534	58,577
	May	2,419	1,096	702	154	135	4,506	
	Jun	2,501	1,352	578	100	144	4,675	
	Jul	2,640	1,274	1,017	133	187	5,251	
	Aug	2,755	1,409	951	140	166	5,421	
	Sep	2,644	1,353	865	147	161	5,170	
	Oct	2,572	1,321	814	107	184	4,998	
	Nov	2,549	1,329	727	90	255	4,950	
	Dec	2,036	872	550	48	175	3,681	
	Jan	2,399	1,311	673	122	173	4,678	
	Feb	2,586	1,325	893	106	284	5,194	
	Mar	2,849	1,448	856	95	271	5,519	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Chichester Library	Apr	1,542	610	993	171	98	3,414	37,372
	May	1,344	399	977	151	63	2,934	
	Jun	1,407	428	972	114	55	2,976	
	Jul	1,634	449	1,054	176	99	3,412	
	Aug	1,632	470	1,045	130	142	3,419	
	Sep	1,601	523	1,081	184	110	3,499	
	Oct	1,516	519	960	115	116	3,226	
	Nov	1,475	438	903	182	94	3,092	
	Dec	1,153	279	368	61	70	1,931	
	Jan	1,427	446	887	119	108	2,987	
	Feb	1,427	421	1,051	155	162	3,216	
	Mar	1,447	508	955	156	200	3,266	
Cloughfern Library	Apr	556	102	468	84	12	1,222	14,147
	May	475	77	452	89	9	1,102	
	Jun	510	68	374	91	17	1,060	
	Jul	623	101	530	92	19	1,365	
	Aug	580	109	524	108	18	1,339	
	Sep	471	114	509	98	37	1,229	
	Oct	567	77	439	94	14	1,191	
	Nov	469	112	493	112	35	1,221	
	Dec	344	74	271	52	11	752	
	Jan	495	130	451	119	25	1,220	
	Feb	479	84	439	88	14	1,104	
	Mar	600	100	508	112	22	1,342	
Coalisland Library	Apr	978	188	1,354	183	87	2,790	34,242
	May	853	251	1,273	217	82	2,676	
	Jun	947	211	1,142	195	57	2,552	
	Jul	987	262	1,894	337	101	3,581	
	Aug	971	234	1,546	353	97	3,201	
	Sep	910	278	1,503	254	94	3,039	
	Oct	926	278	1,746	360	135	3,445	
	Nov	849	256	1,597	185	117	3,004	
	Dec	740	144	638	99	47	1,668	
	Jan	712	227	1,412	184	95	2,630	
	Feb	840	244	1,442	280	91	2,897	
	Mar	820	238	1,396	224	81	2,759	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Coleraine Library	Apr	2,266	950	2,155	256	295	5,922	71,089
	May	2,255	832	2,007	184	232	5,510	
	Jun	2,387	804	1,977	155	216	5,539	
	Jul	2,696	999	2,991	359	311	7,356	
	Aug	2,667	957	2,437	318	308	6,687	
	Sep	2,519	913	2,027	244	272	5,975	
	Oct	2,496	993	2,458	346	317	6,610	
	Nov	2,526	787	2,284	266	309	6,172	
	Dec	1,913	530	1,120	94	225	3,882	
	Jan	2,328	883	2,022	287	220	5,740	
	Feb	2,197	880	2,199	332	282	5,890	
	Mar	2,386	877	1,995	263	285	5,806	
Colin Glen Library	Apr	1,075	421	789	149	72	2,506	33,607
	May	1,137	403	854	188	105	2,687	
	Jun	1,138	418	811	134	88	2,589	
	Jul	1,322	437	1,065	168	96	3,088	
	Aug	1,243	489	928	176	104	2,940	
	Sep	1,339	500	1,191	312	90	3,432	
	Oct	1,128	460	1,329	316	109	3,342	
	Nov	979	473	1,129	228	83	2,892	
	Dec	733	250	585	92	60	1,720	
	Jan	963	389	1,001	209	108	2,670	
	Feb	1,028	379	1,074	241	150	2,872	
	Mar	1,045	444	1,087	175	118	2,869	
Comber Library	Apr	66	2	5	0	0	73	34,033
	May	1,006	386	831	173	24	2,420	
	Jun	1,332	429	1,294	220	15	3,290	
	Jul	1,653	470	1,412	201	32	3,768	
	Aug	1,582	464	1,315	204	45	3,610	
	Sep	1,482	487	1,321	243	60	3,593	
	Oct	1,445	445	1,226	224	26	3,366	
	Nov	1,339	349	968	173	40	2,869	
	Dec	1,030	208	526	91	27	1,882	
	Jan	1,316	382	913	156	50	2,817	
	Feb	1,260	336	1,025	153	58	2,832	
	Mar	1,476	402	1,378	195	62	3,513	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Cookstown Library	Apr	1,892	685	2,515	404	186	5,682	69,130
	May	1,860	668	2,384	406	184	5,502	
	Jun	2,070	591	2,608	298	192	5,759	
	Jul	2,298	727	3,606	478	203	7,312	
	Aug	2,221	724	3,451	518	207	7,121	
	Sep	2,078	706	2,868	497	191	6,340	
	Oct	1,832	727	2,610	483	205	5,857	
	Nov	1,827	638	2,497	448	205	5,615	
	Dec	1,505	439	1,399	175	168	3,686	
	Jan	1,780	679	2,235	471	177	5,342	
	Feb	1,714	680	2,392	483	252	5,521	
	Mar	1,765	645	2,335	429	219	5,393	
Cregagh Library	Apr	1,249	490	1,269	174	46	3,228	40,421
	May	1,084	439	1,342	176	21	3,062	
	Jun	1,262	427	1,419	150	24	3,282	
	Jul	1,397	567	1,473	228	31	3,696	
	Aug	1,351	480	1,434	278	51	3,594	
	Sep	1,197	571	1,609	317	35	3,729	
	Oct	1,260	556	1,687	312	56	3,871	
	Nov	1,261	472	1,377	220	72	3,402	
	Dec	987	272	858	98	60	2,275	
	Jan	1,268	507	1,187	203	47	3,212	
	Feb	1,084	477	1,349	276	60	3,246	
	Mar	1,257	449	1,688	339	91	3,824	
Creggan Library	Apr	667	149	690	83	21	1,610	18,402
	May	746	171	670	86	12	1,685	
	Jun	544	155	597	73	30	1,399	
	Jul	525	172	653	67	31	1,448	
	Aug	548	147	581	77	22	1,375	
	Sep	710	138	798	90	35	1,771	
	Oct	518	161	900	106	18	1,703	
	Nov	507	149	784	81	23	1,544	
	Dec	355	59	222	31	11	678	
	Jan	496	130	756	119	26	1,527	
	Feb	458	127	747	102	17	1,451	
	Mar	720	165	1,165	135	26	2,211	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Crossmaglen Library	Apr	323	100	724	110	17	1,274	16,743
	May	329	103	673	142	38	1,285	
	Jun	412	132	879	135	33	1,591	
	Jul	488	145	1,114	223	68	2,038	
	Aug	386	180	1,028	154	56	1,804	
	Sep	374	173	853	119	55	1,574	
	Oct	377	111	755	97	55	1,395	
	Nov	360	91	682	82	33	1,248	
	Dec	241	55	325	17	20	658	
	Jan	388	138	725	108	40	1,399	
	Feb	360	130	540	128	42	1,200	
	Mar	390	116	650	71	50	1,277	
Crumlin Library	Apr	430	151	650	152	7	1,390	15,866
	May	380	164	734	157	20	1,455	
	Jun	433	142	660	141	10	1,386	
	Jul	436	154	764	104	18	1,476	
	Aug	460	191	910	116	11	1,688	
	Sep	376	163	850	141	12	1,542	
	Oct	363	154	757	136	7	1,417	
	Nov	358	147	646	129	13	1,293	
	Dec	257	92	321	37	10	717	
	Jan	334	95	568	134	12	1,143	
	Feb	321	123	501	137	12	1,094	
	Mar	381	129	620	124	11	1,265	
Cushendall Library	Apr	707	138	356	18	21	1,240	16,160
	May	761	236	436	65	20	1,518	
	Jun	753	164	442	46	13	1,418	
	Jul	757	191	676	55	23	1,702	
	Aug	615	137	505	40	39	1,336	
	Sep	634	115	389	54	31	1,223	
	Oct	601	139	495	64	17	1,316	
	Nov	634	131	502	70	24	1,361	
	Dec	435	62	240	35	20	792	
	Jan	670	135	500	71	27	1,403	
	Feb	665	93	597	70	26	1,451	
	Mar	596	122	586	64	32	1,400	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Derry Central Library	Apr	3,405	1,936	2,084	353	571	8,349	96,000
	May	3,347	1,832	1,881	249	500	7,809	
	Jun	3,342	1,872	1,864	160	387	7,625	
	Jul	3,797	1,996	2,802	286	306	9,187	
	Aug	3,627	2,029	2,341	233	295	8,525	
	Sep	3,522	2,294	2,030	240	344	8,430	
	Oct	3,155	2,322	2,253	312	425	8,467	
	Nov	3,243	2,196	1,944	281	414	8,078	
	Dec	2,495	1,151	1,081	134	330	5,191	
	Jan	3,198	1,843	1,811	208	466	7,526	
	Feb	3,301	2,041	2,132	235	542	8,251	
	Mar	3,628	2,148	2,026	269	491	8,562	
Donaghadee Library	Apr	1,658	510	855	240	24	3,287	41,844
	May	1,725	403	835	202	57	3,222	
	Jun	1,991	422	777	154	28	3,372	
	Jul	2,109	475	889	197	29	3,699	
	Aug	1,914	474	947	177	20	3,532	
	Sep	2,020	555	1,102	304	43	4,024	
	Oct	1,885	555	1,147	250	33	3,870	
	Nov	1,747	520	1,403	299	50	4,019	
	Dec	1,575	356	544	146	28	2,649	
	Jan	1,621	453	875	217	70	3,236	
	Feb	1,779	380	836	210	63	3,268	
	Mar	1,871	480	1,020	198	97	3,666	
Downpatrick Library	Apr	1,856	692	2,048	229	85	4,910	60,658
	May	1,718	667	1,945	269	112	4,711	
	Jun	1,822	660	1,963	186	149	4,780	
	Jul	1,971	751	2,788	284	220	6,014	
	Aug	1,811	753	2,600	291	212	5,667	
	Sep	1,739	828	2,172	326	168	5,233	
	Oct	1,692	716	2,536	344	185	5,473	
	Nov	1,543	751	2,288	444	221	5,247	
	Dec	1,333	485	1,305	181	160	3,464	
	Jan	1,502	683	2,044	355	205	4,789	
	Feb	1,584	734	2,160	427	256	5,161	
	Mar	1,651	687	2,189	310	372	5,209	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Draperstown Library	Apr	275	74	536	132	2	1,019	12,653
	May	286	88	599	124	9	1,106	
	Jun	355	102	568	95	7	1,127	
	Jul	303	99	631	91	16	1,140	
	Aug	291	86	554	69	9	1,009	
	Sep	312	133	553	79	17	1,094	
	Oct	338	107	469	97	16	1,027	
	Nov	356	119	518	83	14	1,090	
	Dec	256	69	261	39	15	640	
	Jan	308	101	494	88	11	1,002	
	Feb	367	103	472	88	29	1,059	
	Mar	430	122	679	96	13	1,340	
Dromore Library	Apr	472	177	610	108	20	1,387	18,648
	May	436	151	829	85	22	1,523	
	Jun	574	137	803	101	17	1,632	
	Jul	641	152	766	114	19	1,692	
	Aug	542	157	761	111	34	1,605	
	Sep	518	175	743	125	28	1,589	
	Oct	549	190	999	146	34	1,918	
	Nov	507	148	826	111	23	1,615	
	Dec	389	83	396	69	15	952	
	Jan	420	135	838	86	41	1,520	
	Feb	484	105	804	108	49	1,550	
	Mar	466	122	935	119	23	1,665	
Dundonald Library	Apr	1,217	445	1,120	210	26	3,018	31,923
	May	1,086	389	910	120	9	2,514	
	Jun	1,065	362	825	113	19	2,384	
	Jul	1,139	331	1,091	169	21	2,751	
	Aug	1,067	368	819	157	38	2,449	
	Sep	1,141	397	1,148	209	28	2,923	
	Oct	1,020	388	1,144	249	59	2,860	
	Nov	1,114	384	1,012	217	47	2,774	
	Dec	849	244	563	72	32	1,760	
	Jan	1,075	449	938	218	67	2,747	
	Feb	932	374	980	264	72	2,622	
	Mar	1,166	420	1,238	222	75	3,121	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Dungannon Library	Apr	1,988	864	2,317	407	240	5,816	68,832
	May	1,776	830	2,009	332	188	5,135	
	Jun	1,848	802	2,257	361	212	5,480	
	Jul	2,126	1,027	3,889	663	267	7,972	
	Aug	1,945	838	3,123	451	274	6,631	
	Sep	1,960	1,022	2,438	357	228	6,005	
	Oct	1,836	918	2,672	459	183	6,068	
	Nov	1,814	934	2,353	440	267	5,808	
	Dec	1,502	488	1,308	225	157	3,680	
	Jan	1,783	887	2,025	403	251	5,349	
	Feb	1,641	1,011	2,249	443	294	5,638	
	Mar	1,826	905	1,927	353	239	5,250	
Dungiven Library	Apr	433	105	766	67	43	1,414	24,537
	May	435	120	633	87	37	1,312	
	Jun	468	129	779	81	33	1,490	
	Jul	494	109	1,263	168	76	2,110	
	Aug	426	99	981	102	78	1,686	
	Sep	483	93	841	75	67	1,559	
	Oct	602	254	1,710	267	143	2,976	
	Nov	683	224	1,479	229	132	2,747	
	Dec	581	134	697	101	51	1,564	
	Jan	662	205	1,353	200	104	2,524	
	Feb	605	218	1,288	231	121	2,463	
	Mar	708	219	1,499	156	110	2,692	
Enniskillen Library	Apr	1,939	1,210	2,313	351	265	6,078	71,953
	May	1,737	1,048	2,069	302	162	5,318	
	Jun	2,049	1,086	1,929	262	194	5,520	
	Jul	2,256	1,253	3,678	428	300	7,915	
	Aug	2,186	1,260	2,974	437	234	7,091	
	Sep	2,018	1,299	2,284	417	259	6,277	
	Oct	1,958	1,312	2,514	372	222	6,378	
	Nov	1,873	1,300	2,336	424	285	6,218	
	Dec	1,673	812	1,329	227	131	4,172	
	Jan	1,790	1,105	1,933	335	142	5,305	
	Feb	1,773	1,165	2,394	348	184	5,864	
	Mar	1,911	1,192	2,227	335	152	5,817	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Falls Road Library	Apr	828	304	453	99	73	1,757	20,151
	May	678	271	448	108	69	1,574	
	Jun	771	215	386	68	30	1,470	
	Jul	851	335	526	61	59	1,832	
	Aug	831	338	513	50	61	1,793	
	Sep	823	314	574	89	62	1,862	
	Oct	762	280	560	103	55	1,760	
	Nov	806	252	621	106	80	1,865	
	Dec	572	192	268	28	57	1,117	
	Jan	773	299	559	74	118	1,823	
	Feb	803	289	434	87	102	1,715	
	Mar	778	286	366	84	69	1,583	
Finaghy Library	Apr	1,828	469	1,697	358	132	4,484	53,097
	May	1,737	423	1,837	401	107	4,505	
	Jun	1,929	475	1,435	271	89	4,199	
	Jul	2,271	526	1,484	217	190	4,688	
	Aug	1,962	442	1,475	239	222	4,340	
	Sep	2,050	523	1,700	318	189	4,780	
	Oct	1,821	470	1,883	397	223	4,794	
	Nov	1,866	477	2,109	404	181	5,037	
	Dec	1,256	236	872	147	123	2,634	
	Jan	1,575	361	1,413	298	135	3,782	
	Feb	1,665	430	1,865	388	232	4,580	
	Mar	2,014	461	2,080	439	280	5,274	
Fintona Library	Apr	323	53	436	38	30	880	9,594
	May	225	71	348	28	15	687	
	Jun	224	51	275	23	5	578	
	Jul	282	85	454	26	15	862	
	Aug	312	82	435	43	31	903	
	Sep	298	54	443	46	34	875	
	Oct	283	74	507	53	15	932	
	Nov	279	57	412	50	30	828	
	Dec	219	53	185	34	6	497	
	Jan	237	53	361	44	12	707	
	Feb	256	71	477	50	24	878	
	Mar	289	85	508	49	36	967	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Fivemiletown Library	Apr	530	183	801	118	58	1,690	19,100
	May	507	167	739	101	44	1,558	
	Jun	422	161	680	85	43	1,391	
	Jul	506	163	1,236	123	47	2,075	
	Aug	501	229	1,031	131	80	1,972	
	Sep	406	146	893	96	57	1,598	
	Oct	468	172	952	131	41	1,764	
	Nov	449	170	843	122	46	1,630	
	Dec	319	90	407	79	20	915	
	Jan	416	149	741	85	41	1,432	
	Feb	431	140	819	126	42	1,558	
	Mar	408	168	783	101	57	1,517	
Garvagh Library	Apr	320	70	361	32	6	789	10,986
	May	280	69	418	58	19	844	
	Jun	294	83	393	56	5	831	
	Jul	363	92	644	40	20	1,159	
	Aug	350	93	490	37	32	1,002	
	Sep	323	77	392	66	18	876	
	Oct	274	80	625	41	23	1,043	
	Nov	248	85	470	61	19	883	
	Dec	203	34	308	22	15	582	
	Jan	277	55	506	92	6	936	
	Feb	297	51	478	32	8	866	
	Mar	307	69	673	100	26	1,175	
Gilford Library	Apr	252	44	292	45	34	667	7,050
	May	252	49	223	56	26	606	
	Jun	260	55	380	44	11	750	
	Jul	260	44	455	56	7	822	
	Aug	239	49	291	27	26	632	
	Sep	216	40	264	21	31	572	
	Oct	209	62	179	22	12	484	
	Nov	199	47	314	33	26	619	
	Dec	136	25	87	13	7	268	
	Jan	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Feb	258	83	264	34	20	659	
	Mar	302	146	422	81	20	971	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Glengormley Library	Apr	3,648	1,274	2,282	432	285	7,921	102,399
	May	3,530	1,230	2,520	526	271	8,077	
	Jun	4,051	1,302	2,394	380	214	8,341	
	Jul	4,419	1,492	3,500	477	304	10,192	
	Aug	4,044	1,354	3,198	506	276	9,378	
	Sep	4,163	1,480	3,044	554	261	9,502	
	Oct	3,895	1,509	2,875	566	243	9,088	
	Nov	3,842	1,347	2,703	516	252	8,660	
	Dec	3,034	769	1,422	203	170	5,598	
	Jan	3,631	1,338	2,567	483	280	8,299	
	Feb	3,525	1,223	2,667	594	319	8,328	
	Mar	3,994	1,346	2,784	578	313	9,015	
Greenisland Library	Apr	760	222	881	110	29	2,002	23,299
	May	688	198	852	163	27	1,928	
	Jun	648	231	705	105	26	1,715	
	Jul	862	225	818	121	28	2,054	
	Aug	773	268	813	95	41	1,990	
	Sep	763	247	1,024	151	25	2,210	
	Oct	683	265	1,146	193	33	2,320	
	Nov	679	213	927	134	69	2,022	
	Dec	583	110	531	74	25	1,323	
	Jan	790	203	922	138	42	2,095	
	Feb	631	174	811	129	25	1,770	
	Mar	687	209	794	156	24	1,870	
Greystone Library	Apr	942	219	662	88	38	1,949	20,923
	May	787	184	542	112	50	1,675	
	Jun	830	191	606	88	28	1,743	
	Jul	946	242	564	80	36	1,868	
	Aug	878	179	434	53	24	1,568	
	Sep	827	211	652	95	37	1,822	
	Oct	819	234	608	94	37	1,792	
	Nov	797	216	405	89	28	1,535	
	Dec	642	138	236	40	18	1,074	
	Jan	789	213	493	91	29	1,615	
	Feb	753	248	475	127	47	1,650	
	Mar	955	298	1,049	280	50	2,632	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Grove Library	Apr	867	346	1,057	174	146	2,590	33,149
	May	806	247	982	195	176	2,406	
	Jun	906	275	1,004	235	165	2,585	
	Jul	889	270	1,318	264	222	2,963	
	Aug	1,005	384	1,343	244	211	3,187	
	Sep	995	382	1,407	299	174	3,257	
	Oct	925	362	1,498	317	203	3,305	
	Nov	937	290	1,222	228	272	2,949	
	Dec	650	188	518	130	161	1,647	
	Jan	857	291	991	264	192	2,595	
	Feb	847	274	1,233	251	244	2,849	
	Mar	932	294	1,109	240	241	2,816	
Holywood Arches Library	Apr	1,841	517	978	125	108	3,569	44,644
	May	1,607	456	851	98	108	3,120	
	Jun	1,842	411	953	141	187	3,534	
	Jul	2,015	554	1,130	163	157	4,019	
	Aug	2,037	521	1,223	170	199	4,150	
	Sep	2,026	562	1,102	170	163	4,023	
	Oct	1,973	573	1,316	147	198	4,207	
	Nov	2,058	516	987	124	141	3,826	
	Dec	1,515	334	508	71	100	2,528	
	Jan	1,928	453	827	129	161	3,498	
	Feb	1,892	542	988	109	203	3,734	
	Mar	2,126	587	1,338	155	230	4,436	
Holywood Library	Apr	1,785	654	1,375	235	65	4,114	41,938
	May	1,487	540	1,127	167	92	3,413	
	Jun	1,619	607	1,191	201	128	3,746	
	Jul	1,865	786	1,557	231	144	4,583	
	Aug	1,699	709	1,363	215	116	4,102	
	Sep	1,657	716	1,426	227	118	4,144	
	Oct	1,590	727	1,451	251	149	4,168	
	Nov	1,727	564	1,315	213	125	3,944	
	Dec	1,198	420	755	98	61	2,532	
	Jan	928	344	709	142	34	2,157	
	Feb	1,020	404	936	104	32	2,496	
	Mar	1,103	467	831	78	60	2,539	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Irish and Local Studies Library	Apr	2	2	0	0	0	4	86
	May	0	7	0	0	0	7	
	Jun	2	2	0	0	1	5	
	Jul	0	5	0	0	4	9	
	Aug	2	2	0	0	0	4	
	Sep	4	7	1	0	2	14	
	Oct	1	3	0	0	0	4	
	Nov	0	2	0	0	8	10	
	Dec	0	2	0	0	4	6	
	Jan	0	1	0	0	2	3	
	Feb	0	1	0	0	11	12	
	Mar	1	2	0	0	5	8	
Irvinestown Library	Apr	870	219	807	69	49	2,014	24,396
	May	774	199	679	95	36	1,783	
	Jun	886	170	884	112	40	2,092	
	Jul	911	192	1,126	119	95	2,443	
	Aug	826	273	1,054	84	119	2,356	
	Sep	723	230	840	132	49	1,974	
	Oct	808	217	804	97	49	1,975	
	Nov	891	207	889	78	50	2,115	
	Dec	749	132	478	70	26	1,455	
	Jan	838	206	712	144	50	1,950	
	Feb	793	214	892	139	69	2,107	
	Mar	718	237	984	132	61	2,132	
Keady Library	Apr	229	66	251	28	11	585	21,188
	May	197	42	321	34	15	609	
	Jun	643	213	1,330	147	115	2,448	
	Jul	581	206	1,177	187	95	2,246	
	Aug	453	134	937	150	101	1,775	
	Sep	550	152	1,053	154	103	2,012	
	Oct	722	162	1,162	166	134	2,346	
	Nov	662	124	968	155	82	1,991	
	Dec	462	78	515	53	51	1,159	
	Jan	790	222	917	100	72	2,101	
	Feb	558	225	915	113	75	1,886	
	Mar	593	262	1,003	105	67	2,030	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Kells & Connor Library	Apr	280	89	213	26	10	618	9,220
	May	322	78	229	35	9	673	
	Jun	280	101	219	28	11	639	
	Jul	346	65	366	34	4	815	
	Aug	339	58	247	35	7	686	
	Sep	258	88	312	43	6	707	
	Oct	310	95	315	44	16	780	
	Nov	237	93	298	43	10	681	
	Dec	205	32	130	10	2	379	
	Jan	264	73	255	31	16	639	
	Feb	339	79	452	29	16	915	
	Mar	491	274	798	113	12	1,688	
Kilkeel Library	Apr	1,500	449	1,441	242	161	3,793	42,853
	May	1,279	410	1,300	306	139	3,434	
	Jun	1,336	381	1,514	220	116	3,567	
	Jul	1,547	485	2,405	427	179	5,043	
	Aug	1,273	448	2,155	371	155	4,402	
	Sep	1,273	353	1,372	325	123	3,446	
	Oct	1,196	405	1,597	272	147	3,617	
	Nov	1,078	389	1,485	300	119	3,371	
	Dec	941	205	792	106	90	2,134	
	Jan	1,118	383	1,272	241	108	3,122	
	Feb	979	384	1,528	362	156	3,409	
	Mar	1,206	383	1,473	288	165	3,515	
Killyleagh Library	Apr	387	170	505	114	20	1,196	14,268
	May	423	139	408	74	24	1,068	
	Jun	422	125	379	69	19	1,014	
	Jul	490	158	398	57	18	1,121	
	Aug	442	108	253	50	18	871	
	Sep	458	122	319	74	18	991	
	Oct	429	133	454	150	16	1,182	
	Nov	405	141	538	176	30	1,290	
	Dec	331	84	181	43	14	653	
	Jan	542	223	702	187	22	1,676	
	Feb	656	337	785	237	61	2,076	
	Mar	460	191	345	89	45	1,130	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Kilrea Library	Apr	376	131	541	52	19	1,119	13,402
	May	399	110	572	60	7	1,148	
	Jun	398	90	461	49	11	1,009	
	Jul	479	142	798	70	23	1,512	
	Aug	365	81	697	60	29	1,232	
	Sep	431	153	602	86	20	1,292	
	Oct	415	121	567	90	30	1,223	
	Nov	373	113	586	63	19	1,154	
	Dec	313	78	214	24	14	643	
	Jan	377	99	437	45	17	975	
	Feb	367	111	377	46	18	919	
	Mar	429	123	518	66	40	1,176	
Larne Library	Apr	2,613	1,078	1,533	234	376	5,834	66,749
	May	2,404	871	1,518	214	278	5,285	
	Jun	2,608	887	1,572	239	213	5,519	
	Jul	2,584	991	2,156	234	314	6,279	
	Aug	2,551	971	1,637	225	331	5,715	
	Sep	2,926	1,072	1,652	318	275	6,243	
	Oct	2,533	996	1,743	310	293	5,875	
	Nov	2,609	989	1,642	242	340	5,822	
	Dec	2,019	667	848	110	261	3,905	
	Jan	2,388	990	1,259	181	299	5,117	
	Feb	2,244	1,022	1,658	236	338	5,498	
	Mar	2,541	999	1,511	250	356	5,657	
Limavady Library	Apr	1,847	627	1,997	182	198	4,851	63,485
	May	1,781	608	2,073	211	177	4,850	
	Jun	1,918	566	2,114	210	188	4,996	
	Jul	2,274	684	3,232	307	278	6,775	
	Aug	2,023	612	2,952	236	334	6,157	
	Sep	1,995	715	2,806	336	279	6,131	
	Oct	1,942	673	2,521	286	234	5,656	
	Nov	1,850	620	2,292	287	261	5,310	
	Dec	1,732	305	1,355	138	141	3,671	
	Jan	1,805	579	1,911	269	208	4,772	
	Feb	1,849	621	2,160	256	253	5,139	
	Mar	1,985	563	2,198	215	216	5,177	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Lisburn City Library	Apr	4,126	2,494	5,557	874	385	13,436	154,099
	May	3,461	2,145	4,537	734	332	11,209	
	Jun	4,033	2,367	4,426	557	394	11,777	
	Jul	4,270	2,576	6,472	881	552	14,751	
	Aug	4,097	2,455	6,378	761	564	14,255	
	Sep	4,169	2,650	5,678	849	406	13,752	
	Oct	3,936	2,601	6,098	959	489	14,083	
	Nov	4,040	2,387	5,405	840	432	13,104	
	Dec	2,987	1,352	2,746	324	327	7,736	
	Jan	3,838	2,425	5,147	718	518	12,646	
	Feb	3,836	2,403	5,889	877	535	13,540	
	Mar	4,118	2,392	5,940	867	493	13,810	
Lisburn Road Library	Apr	1,697	552	1,690	214	71	4,224	48,722
	May	1,608	458	1,373	170	70	3,679	
	Jun	1,792	507	1,341	140	65	3,845	
	Jul	2,090	660	1,485	191	71	4,497	
	Aug	1,960	577	1,610	193	83	4,423	
	Sep	1,852	585	1,575	225	76	4,313	
	Oct	1,827	542	1,658	220	84	4,331	
	Nov	1,587	467	1,576	241	91	3,962	
	Dec	1,561	384	804	106	105	2,960	
	Jan	1,879	582	1,403	261	102	4,227	
	Feb	1,736	582	1,307	217	165	4,007	
	Mar	1,812	580	1,525	175	162	4,254	
Lisnaskea Library	Apr	477	226	678	99	63	1,543	23,270
	May	440	265	853	129	68	1,755	
	Jun	556	253	767	104	67	1,747	
	Jul	479	289	1,350	166	120	2,404	
	Aug	490	255	1,307	166	162	2,380	
	Sep	492	281	983	115	57	1,928	
	Oct	497	315	1,250	161	105	2,328	
	Nov	504	271	1,037	156	83	2,051	
	Dec	384	159	488	37	55	1,123	
	Jan	440	252	827	126	77	1,722	
	Feb	486	316	1,103	125	84	2,114	
	Mar	497	391	1,081	124	82	2,175	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Lurgan Library	Apr	2,809	985	2,233	385	252	6,664	86,253
	May	2,673	904	2,173	373	287	6,410	
	Jun	2,957	899	2,555	484	175	7,070	
	Jul	3,308	1,139	3,913	613	287	9,260	
	Aug	3,249	1,080	3,343	556	288	8,516	
	Sep	3,106	1,108	2,746	488	267	7,715	
	Oct	2,940	1,125	2,902	538	240	7,745	
	Nov	2,843	1,043	2,366	425	243	6,920	
	Dec	2,334	611	1,437	218	180	4,780	
	Jan	2,967	1,014	2,297	433	224	6,935	
	Feb	2,710	976	2,534	434	283	6,937	
	Mar	3,215	965	2,473	390	258	7,301	
Maghera Library	Apr	1,032	353	1,290	230	72	2,977	34,796
	May	1,003	235	1,111	194	46	2,589	
	Jun	1,026	288	1,088	206	42	2,650	
	Jul	1,169	333	1,529	262	78	3,371	
	Aug	1,046	292	1,247	195	69	2,849	
	Sep	959	322	1,402	270	84	3,037	
	Oct	947	307	1,492	305	87	3,138	
	Nov	913	310	1,432	228	88	2,971	
	Dec	847	180	607	108	64	1,806	
	Jan	993	318	1,285	289	86	2,971	
	Feb	963	356	1,287	266	88	2,960	
	Mar	1,135	392	1,474	386	90	3,477	
Magherafelt Library	Apr	1,357	506	2,315	443	225	4,846	56,312
	May	1,244	389	2,046	514	210	4,403	
	Jun	1,228	388	1,821	279	197	3,913	
	Jul	1,560	488	2,577	386	267	5,278	
	Aug	1,449	429	2,359	384	261	4,882	
	Sep	1,384	538	2,345	470	199	4,936	
	Oct	1,345	516	2,749	466	260	5,336	
	Nov	1,287	452	2,505	430	230	4,904	
	Dec	1,111	261	1,328	165	178	3,043	
	Jan	1,305	557	2,084	479	201	4,626	
	Feb	1,285	553	2,225	501	308	4,872	
	Mar	1,342	573	2,525	515	318	5,273	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Moirá Library	Apr	638	113	1,253	167	6	2,177	23,107
	May	410	122	1,127	128	4	1,791	
	Jun	539	134	1,023	147	10	1,853	
	Jul	587	123	1,078	93	9	1,890	
	Aug	534	130	1,083	122	5	1,874	
	Sep	523	155	1,347	217	12	2,254	
	Oct	544	155	1,341	191	6	2,237	
	Nov	524	136	1,243	192	10	2,105	
	Dec	384	83	557	103	10	1,137	
	Jan	424	149	1,150	215	12	1,950	
	Feb	418	170	1,054	212	22	1,876	
	Mar	491	144	1,132	172	24	1,963	
Moneymore Library	Apr	339	64	298	59	18	778	9,627
	May	367	78	392	103	15	955	
	Jun	328	56	348	65	10	807	
	Jul	379	70	399	82	17	947	
	Aug	331	68	334	80	43	856	
	Sep	270	71	304	68	22	735	
	Oct	289	62	332	84	29	796	
	Nov	321	48	367	120	30	886	
	Dec	187	18	134	36	6	381	
	Jan	283	44	314	83	41	765	
	Feb	301	68	291	57	19	736	
	Mar	316	63	464	117	25	985	
Moy Library	Apr	275	68	449	153	32	977	12,705
	May	308	120	366	126	24	944	
	Jun	349	70	469	144	36	1,068	
	Jul	358	91	569	229	31	1,278	
	Aug	296	87	573	168	22	1,146	
	Sep	301	67	517	167	19	1,071	
	Oct	292	81	509	118	41	1,041	
	Nov	283	71	495	90	52	991	
	Dec	260	53	225	24	22	584	
	Jan	280	76	503	146	38	1,043	
	Feb	309	120	588	141	37	1,195	
	Mar	421	83	669	152	42	1,367	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Newcastle Library	Apr	1,862	780	1,631	323	101	4,697	51,393
	May	1,531	594	1,390	269	148	3,932	
	Jun	1,762	719	1,485	242	181	4,389	
	Jul	2,013	793	1,643	247	226	4,922	
	Aug	1,715	726	1,525	249	220	4,435	
	Sep	1,681	738	1,528	250	184	4,381	
	Oct	1,698	737	1,490	254	188	4,367	
	Nov	1,537	631	1,770	350	212	4,500	
	Dec	1,399	429	1,092	172	126	3,218	
	Jan	1,604	647	1,425	278	183	4,137	
	Feb	1,576	639	1,308	250	189	3,962	
	Mar	1,600	666	1,598	372	217	4,453	
Newry Library	Apr	3,475	1,183	2,923	401	255	8,237	75,313
	May	2,903	997	2,888	366	294	7,448	
	Jun	3,199	1,078	3,016	328	336	7,957	
	Jul	3,453	1,222	4,422	518	386	10,001	
	Aug	3,418	1,228	4,022	443	384	9,495	
	Sep	3,330	1,260	2,984	385	302	8,261	
	Oct	3,074	1,421	3,516	451	375	8,837	
	Nov	2,976	1,240	2,903	369	295	7,783	
	Dec	2,168	686	1,501	152	191	4,698	
	Jan	362	105	204	18	8	697	
	Feb	414	142	387	43	19	1,005	
	Mar	389	114	327	29	35	894	
Newtownards Library	Apr	2,536	825	1,501	202	31	5,095	60,563
	May	2,417	735	1,641	297	51	5,141	
	Jun	2,509	767	1,472	206	41	4,995	
	Jul	2,577	729	1,940	226	46	5,518	
	Aug	2,539	739	1,724	239	40	5,281	
	Sep	2,507	773	1,664	292	59	5,295	
	Oct	2,374	810	1,738	288	68	5,278	
	Nov	2,303	775	1,527	314	44	4,963	
	Dec	1,876	487	1,020	187	35	3,605	
	Jan	2,283	790	1,397	199	44	4,713	
	Feb	2,136	784	1,814	297	61	5,092	
	Mar	2,392	817	2,012	285	81	5,587	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Newtownbreda Library	Apr	1,696	578	1,648	310	59	4,291	54,474
	May	1,413	511	1,653	310	106	3,993	
	Jun	1,634	498	1,701	316	74	4,223	
	Jul	1,949	564	2,141	239	115	5,008	
	Aug	1,878	620	1,979	291	151	4,919	
	Sep	1,817	640	2,140	364	157	5,118	
	Oct	1,772	515	2,400	369	142	5,198	
	Nov	1,716	443	2,053	322	152	4,686	
	Dec	1,446	310	1,159	150	80	3,145	
	Jan	1,516	546	2,059	312	115	4,548	
	Feb	1,482	572	2,010	326	140	4,530	
	Mar	1,708	516	2,163	299	129	4,815	
Newtownstewart Library	Apr	306	78	318	54	5	761	10,203
	May	269	78	417	76	19	859	
	Jun	302	91	352	70	11	826	
	Jul	376	71	563	55	21	1,086	
	Aug	350	102	545	85	12	1,094	
	Sep	230	83	433	86	3	835	
	Oct	288	90	550	95	20	1,043	
	Nov	294	82	501	75	15	967	
	Dec	151	31	104	11	2	299	
	Jan	207	52	262	49	8	578	
	Feb	195	91	525	89	11	911	
	Mar	298	82	438	111	15	944	
Omagh Library	Apr	3,023	1,746	4,358	675	439	10,241	128,170
	May	2,914	1,646	4,350	577	358	9,845	
	Jun	3,130	1,647	4,346	602	287	10,012	
	Jul	3,816	1,874	7,119	855	358	14,022	
	Aug	3,523	2,068	6,381	830	431	13,233	
	Sep	3,270	2,019	4,981	667	354	11,291	
	Oct	3,198	2,019	5,523	644	314	11,698	
	Nov	3,026	1,722	4,271	573	358	9,950	
	Dec	2,513	959	2,776	346	279	6,873	
	Jan	3,098	1,745	4,051	537	302	9,733	
	Feb	2,801	1,838	4,649	753	440	10,481	
	Mar	3,240	1,906	4,460	695	490	10,791	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Ormeau Road Library	Apr	1,749	900	1,287	225	125	4,286	51,717
	May	1,610	737	1,211	231	95	3,884	
	Jun	1,767	823	1,063	145	127	3,925	
	Jul	1,945	963	1,902	308	289	5,407	
	Aug	1,799	875	1,535	247	285	4,741	
	Sep	1,705	961	1,393	270	267	4,596	
	Oct	1,731	927	1,414	325	274	4,671	
	Nov	1,736	824	1,436	247	272	4,515	
	Dec	1,065	407	611	109	129	2,321	
	Jan	1,632	790	1,372	330	250	4,374	
	Feb	1,507	780	1,541	301	287	4,416	
	Mar	1,743	850	1,423	278	287	4,581	
Portadown Library	Apr	2,426	776	1,745	288	204	5,439	69,047
	May	2,310	798	1,681	309	181	5,279	
	Jun	2,590	781	1,933	303	219	5,826	
	Jul	2,653	827	2,946	376	249	7,051	
	Aug	2,341	855	2,568	371	302	6,437	
	Sep	2,396	882	2,046	321	191	5,836	
	Oct	2,462	821	2,140	319	230	5,972	
	Nov	2,394	880	2,147	327	191	5,939	
	Dec	1,935	538	1,271	201	129	4,074	
	Jan	2,430	841	1,750	333	148	5,502	
	Feb	2,251	831	1,967	349	216	5,614	
	Mar	2,368	862	2,210	380	258	6,078	
Portaferry Library	Apr	720	212	765	139	15	1,851	20,703
	May	669	218	654	121	9	1,671	
	Jun	708	275	833	115	14	1,945	
	Jul	795	221	703	89	11	1,819	
	Aug	758	207	827	116	5	1,913	
	Sep	809	229	778	108	21	1,945	
	Oct	836	239	830	93	14	2,012	
	Nov	714	190	678	48	25	1,655	
	Dec	523	179	385	28	19	1,134	
	Jan	749	221	547	87	33	1,637	
	Feb	693	213	637	74	29	1,646	
	Mar	692	152	530	65	36	1,475	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Portglenone Library	Apr	342	108	560	49	8	1,067	14,417
	May	392	85	690	97	14	1,278	
	Jun	305	102	639	65	3	1,114	
	Jul	382	106	887	81	14	1,470	
	Aug	457	113	896	91	26	1,583	
	Sep	380	79	663	91	21	1,234	
	Oct	412	129	699	123	19	1,382	
	Nov	366	100	614	66	19	1,165	
	Dec	215	39	387	52	7	700	
	Jan	291	72	588	88	18	1,057	
	Feb	313	85	663	84	21	1,166	
	Mar	359	87	656	88	11	1,201	
Portrush Library	Apr	1,151	322	630	115	97	2,315	25,086
	May	966	244	522	98	150	1,980	
	Jun	1,016	256	587	112	117	2,088	
	Jul	1,227	319	1,078	137	172	2,933	
	Aug	1,086	296	859	99	149	2,489	
	Sep	1,113	283	537	88	103	2,124	
	Oct	1,015	314	712	107	84	2,232	
	Nov	906	280	648	114	96	2,044	
	Dec	758	171	294	28	51	1,302	
	Jan	863	198	492	87	68	1,708	
	Feb	830	246	574	88	123	1,861	
	Mar	914	242	633	73	148	2,010	
Portstewart Library	Apr	1,002	389	891	97	126	2,505	28,218
	May	886	270	651	68	144	2,019	
	Jun	1,049	344	775	94	113	2,375	
	Jul	1,047	464	1,543	192	170	3,416	
	Aug	1,158	360	1,219	153	175	3,065	
	Sep	847	360	778	112	100	2,197	
	Oct	843	361	860	76	88	2,228	
	Nov	926	334	825	84	107	2,276	
	Dec	721	217	435	35	79	1,487	
	Jan	817	306	684	101	140	2,048	
	Feb	841	284	860	95	151	2,231	
	Mar	908	381	854	109	119	2,371	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Randalstown Library	Apr	960	166	755	91	26	1,998	23,081
	May	753	136	771	90	30	1,780	
	Jun	885	152	788	65	33	1,923	
	Jul	918	209	934	102	58	2,221	
	Aug	894	160	851	79	47	2,031	
	Sep	852	156	857	136	37	2,038	
	Oct	892	168	938	107	42	2,147	
	Nov	905	160	858	95	58	2,076	
	Dec	729	107	469	63	32	1,400	
	Jan	783	173	695	86	41	1,778	
	Feb	782	154	699	81	42	1,758	
	Mar	769	182	844	95	41	1,931	
Rathcoole Library	Apr	1,125	369	536	57	152	2,239	26,354
	May	1,029	312	458	78	114	1,991	
	Jun	1,088	334	488	85	85	2,080	
	Jul	1,193	364	760	156	111	2,584	
	Aug	1,213	398	628	128	100	2,467	
	Sep	1,174	356	648	89	73	2,340	
	Oct	1,169	387	635	133	65	2,389	
	Nov	995	317	593	79	71	2,055	
	Dec	802	210	288	31	38	1,369	
	Jan	1,096	342	622	108	99	2,267	
	Feb	929	364	610	112	98	2,113	
	Mar	1,037	401	761	139	122	2,460	
Rathfriland Library	Apr	509	163	956	199	36	1,863	23,594
	May	539	188	826	178	21	1,752	
	Jun	523	139	803	124	26	1,615	
	Jul	617	179	1,017	162	42	2,017	
	Aug	485	193	1,030	144	39	1,891	
	Sep	555	197	1,129	322	34	2,237	
	Oct	608	235	1,160	353	41	2,397	
	Nov	567	147	1,140	325	38	2,217	
	Dec	421	118	465	65	34	1,103	
	Jan	600	156	1,027	276	40	2,099	
	Feb	511	237	1,048	283	32	2,111	
	Mar	542	227	1,209	263	51	2,292	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Richhill Library	Apr	398	145	716	155	26	1,440	16,508
	May	366	130	563	102	26	1,187	
	Jun	352	125	653	106	23	1,259	
	Jul	429	146	741	129	22	1,467	
	Aug	385	131	635	93	37	1,281	
	Sep	365	155	731	104	43	1,398	
	Oct	469	170	785	115	54	1,593	
	Nov	507	170	615	86	29	1,407	
	Dec	332	69	344	34	18	797	
	Jan	392	183	529	107	16	1,227	
	Feb	517	214	740	112	28	1,611	
	Mar	559	216	891	145	30	1,841	
Saintfield Library	Apr	741	292	839	242	25	2,139	24,566
	May	566	260	790	168	36	1,820	
	Jun	587	232	765	220	18	1,822	
	Jul	701	295	992	134	17	2,139	
	Aug	640	227	973	144	29	2,013	
	Sep	593	245	1,116	193	27	2,174	
	Oct	581	284	1,276	306	56	2,503	
	Nov	535	248	1,105	276	40	2,204	
	Dec	496	126	445	67	29	1,163	
	Jan	678	241	886	165	50	2,020	
	Feb	767	258	1,039	185	63	2,312	
	Mar	760	226	1,011	196	64	2,257	
Shankill Road Library	Apr	1,223	295	545	81	100	2,244	22,723
	May	999	298	423	82	98	1,900	
	Jun	1,145	248	514	75	140	2,122	
	Jul	1,089	219	480	74	86	1,948	
	Aug	1,169	260	429	83	179	2,120	
	Sep	1,047	277	505	93	134	2,056	
	Oct	1,080	238	463	85	140	2,006	
	Nov	1,035	281	632	86	95	2,129	
	Dec	740	205	302	37	59	1,343	
	Jan	1,043	253	338	71	76	1,781	
	Feb	893	187	375	59	52	1,566	
	Mar	945	152	318	53	40	1,508	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Shantallow Library	Apr	1,266	312	1,608	197	46	3,429	39,150
	May	1,020	257	1,566	181	44	3,068	
	Jun	1,241	267	1,250	139	35	2,932	
	Jul	1,335	271	1,948	205	54	3,813	
	Aug	1,366	351	1,754	173	102	3,746	
	Sep	1,197	347	1,591	226	77	3,438	
	Oct	1,188	388	1,689	288	59	3,612	
	Nov	1,297	271	1,329	221	48	3,166	
	Dec	886	162	565	64	37	1,714	
	Jan	1,307	309	1,484	223	65	3,388	
	Feb	1,012	346	1,603	283	62	3,306	
	Mar	1,109	341	1,775	241	72	3,538	
Strabane Library	Apr	1,620	424	1,773	198	119	4,134	51,758
	May	1,454	407	1,739	306	79	3,985	
	Jun	1,583	460	1,641	208	86	3,978	
	Jul	1,805	450	2,198	282	100	4,835	
	Aug	1,555	453	2,224	260	102	4,594	
	Sep	1,838	525	1,957	304	79	4,703	
	Oct	1,806	512	2,073	281	98	4,770	
	Nov	1,655	398	2,293	352	87	4,785	
	Dec	1,352	258	862	114	33	2,619	
	Jan	1,588	493	1,614	228	103	4,026	
	Feb	1,590	424	2,019	339	123	4,495	
	Mar	1,730	474	2,170	341	119	4,834	
Strathfoyle Library	Apr	220	96	862	169	37	1,384	16,449
	May	182	87	870	119	32	1,290	
	Jun	245	99	793	129	29	1,295	
	Jul	242	105	756	92	50	1,245	
	Aug	208	71	883	81	63	1,306	
	Sep	220	109	987	183	57	1,556	
	Oct	199	102	1,132	327	52	1,812	
	Nov	222	115	1,094	284	56	1,771	
	Dec	125	37	290	29	18	499	
	Jan	227	105	975	173	29	1,509	
	Feb	195	72	842	198	46	1,353	
	Mar	265	79	833	208	44	1,429	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Suffolk Library	Apr	767	278	545	68	51	1,709	27,681
	May	624	196	566	61	42	1,489	
	Jun	789	224	708	72	28	1,821	
	Jul	1,117	263	905	103	63	2,451	
	Aug	1,192	363	988	136	54	2,733	
	Sep	1,247	328	983	139	60	2,757	
	Oct	1,085	366	858	155	113	2,577	
	Nov	1,177	305	986	171	115	2,754	
	Dec	859	195	453	92	73	1,672	
	Jan	1,086	342	643	117	95	2,283	
	Feb	940	346	1,087	151	119	2,643	
	Mar	1,150	421	941	170	110	2,792	
Tandragee Library	Apr	791	248	964	254	44	2,301	26,643
	May	674	231	1,030	305	39	2,279	
	Jun	766	231	893	216	23	2,129	
	Jul	797	253	1,042	253	30	2,375	
	Aug	833	217	879	198	38	2,165	
	Sep	785	275	879	227	54	2,220	
	Oct	656	259	1,084	282	59	2,340	
	Nov	633	214	1,009	239	54	2,149	
	Dec	641	161	578	81	38	1,499	
	Jan	629	192	1,135	260	65	2,281	
	Feb	658	258	1,064	290	90	2,360	
	Mar	685	210	1,254	346	50	2,545	
Tullycarnet Library	Apr	993	347	500	74	30	1,944	22,560
	May	729	247	484	68	53	1,581	
	Jun	883	284	421	49	90	1,727	
	Jul	1,129	287	561	91	65	2,133	
	Aug	1,096	366	481	74	52	2,069	
	Sep	1,064	350	516	96	90	2,116	
	Oct	988	276	507	64	71	1,906	
	Nov	882	275	540	87	80	1,864	
	Dec	755	186	188	38	59	1,226	
	Jan	918	305	443	77	70	1,813	
	Feb	987	337	506	94	127	2,051	
	Mar	945	344	623	139	79	2,130	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Warrenpoint Library	Apr	1,426	497	1,765	314	137	4,139	49,879
	May	1,161	393	1,669	246	120	3,589	
	Jun	1,167	364	1,598	215	117	3,461	
	Jul	1,538	478	2,009	213	146	4,384	
	Aug	1,482	482	2,277	282	193	4,716	
	Sep	1,385	603	1,888	238	163	4,277	
	Oct	1,342	556	2,111	304	147	4,460	
	Nov	1,288	427	1,826	239	161	3,941	
	Dec	1,065	304	1,061	106	90	2,626	
	Jan	1,679	549	1,985	233	121	4,567	
	Feb	1,688	567	2,185	277	130	4,847	
	Mar	1,701	572	2,183	292	124	4,872	
Waterside Library	Apr	2,281	827	2,511	301	199	6,119	78,424
	May	2,331	819	2,610	319	253	6,332	
	Jun	2,589	883	2,717	316	231	6,736	
	Jul	2,744	903	3,372	464	285	7,768	
	Aug	2,375	807	3,050	392	200	6,824	
	Sep	2,489	907	2,877	382	222	6,877	
	Oct	2,461	926	3,069	394	276	7,126	
	Nov	2,408	797	2,910	335	311	6,761	
	Dec	1,840	493	1,561	196	174	4,264	
	Jan	2,240	745	2,655	279	239	6,158	
	Feb	2,098	806	2,963	389	259	6,515	
	Mar	2,466	866	2,902	405	305	6,944	
Whitehead Library	Apr	1,232	468	760	126	8	2,594	29,049
	May	1,136	428	766	83	18	2,431	
	Jun	1,239	429	708	109	6	2,491	
	Jul	1,387	498	881	169	15	2,950	
	Aug	1,239	452	847	102	26	2,666	
	Sep	1,156	489	625	118	40	2,428	
	Oct	1,178	459	733	145	72	2,587	
	Nov	1,118	425	713	128	30	2,414	
	Dec	779	293	404	72	34	1,582	
	Jan	1,083	423	568	128	37	2,239	
	Feb	1,041	506	629	93	48	2,317	
	Mar	1,158	458	590	105	39	2,350	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Whiterock Library	Apr	392	161	338	70	21	982	9,398
	May	352	170	428	55	11	1,016	
	Jun	358	144	418	43	12	975	
	Jul	373	132	545	49	16	1,115	
	Aug	400	136	523	99	15	1,173	
	Sep	409	161	490	65	17	1,142	
	Oct	391	130	441	57	25	1,044	
	Nov	424	134	325	68	36	987	
	Dec	238	93	134	39	27	531	
	Jan	215	62	124	25	7	433	
	Feb	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Woodstock Road Library	Apr	1,766	441	692	118	37	3,054	34,971
	May	1,477	364	514	122	28	2,505	
	Jun	1,708	411	687	141	50	2,997	
	Jul	1,867	480	990	171	39	3,547	
	Aug	1,772	418	885	140	35	3,250	
	Sep	1,702	422	732	182	41	3,079	
	Oct	1,604	430	894	140	39	3,107	
	Nov	1,723	333	903	95	44	3,098	
	Dec	1,067	170	366	25	26	1,654	
	Jan	1,627	354	677	93	48	2,799	
	Feb	1,589	388	690	125	53	2,845	
	Mar	1,696	388	757	145	50	3,036	
Grand Total		1,545,485	566,278	1,584,380	248,092	137,517	4,081,752	4,081,752

Annex B**Issues:****(i) April 2011 – October 2011**

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Antrim Library	Apr	1,736	671	1,569	216	171	4,363	38,400
	May	1,957	797	1,990	342	205	5,291	
	Jun	1,847	801	1,727	287	212	4,874	
	Jul	2,061	854	2,500	390	203	6,008	
	Aug	2,062	834	2,943	458	275	6,572	
	Sep	2,010	884	2,087	324	198	5,503	
	Oct	1,945	913	2,335	389	207	5,789	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Ardoyne Library	Apr	617	173	439	33	36	1,298	11,083
	May	655	216	530	74	37	1,512	
	Jun	745	176	613	74	26	1,634	
	Jul	668	163	603	70	34	1,538	
	Aug	707	239	817	81	54	1,898	
	Sep	652	200	624	101	73	1,650	
	Oct	633	189	599	90	42	1,553	
Armagh Library	Apr	1,801	599	1,676	238	182	4,496	37,628
	May	1,972	691	1,843	269	231	5,006	
	Jun	1,961	676	1,803	248	204	4,892	
	Jul	2,011	728	2,796	415	254	6,204	
	Aug	2,178	773	2,834	458	234	6,477	
	Sep	2,038	689	1,889	238	196	5,050	
	Oct	1,897	794	2,226	373	213	5,503	
Ballycastle Library	Apr	835	305	719	98	118	2,075	17,931
	May	838	405	862	134	167	2,406	
	Jun	869	413	893	144	107	2,426	
	Jul	1,015	443	1,192	187	165	3,002	
	Aug	973	454	1,046	148	163	2,784	
	Sep	915	393	857	196	133	2,494	
	Oct	969	437	968	215	155	2,744	
Ballyclare Library	Apr	1,279	400	1,288	192	120	3,279	26,407
	May	1,337	457	1,413	282	119	3,608	
	Jun	1,279	427	1,563	220	110	3,599	
	Jul	1,423	464	1,941	249	132	4,209	
	Aug	1,411	454	1,658	194	139	3,856	
	Sep	1,276	459	1,471	201	109	3,516	
	Oct	1,409	494	1,946	373	118	4,340	
Ballyhackamore Library	Apr	1,634	530	1,834	265	209	4,472	35,928
	May	1,788	581	2,288	299	157	5,113	
	Jun	1,796	606	2,174	232	143	4,951	
	Jul	1,827	558	2,135	313	179	5,012	
	Aug	2,031	580	2,362	366	224	5,563	
	Sep	1,856	578	2,510	377	188	5,509	
	Oct	1,895	618	2,312	311	172	5,308	
Ballymena Central Library	Apr	3,183	1,163	2,926	276	358	7,906	65,763
	May	3,563	1,424	3,280	343	358	8,968	
	Jun	3,628	1,361	3,411	290	351	9,041	
	Jul	3,865	1,333	4,331	332	408	10,269	
	Aug	4,092	1,632	4,777	358	478	11,337	
	Sep	3,368	1,505	3,282	374	385	8,914	
	Oct	3,358	1,557	3,718	348	347	9,328	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Ballymoney Library	Apr	1,447	532	1,471	225	161	3,836	36,365
	May	1,740	671	1,993	379	194	4,977	
	Jun	1,851	692	2,082	373	201	5,199	
	Jul	2,034	709	2,423	329	189	5,684	
	Aug	1,993	722	2,708	382	299	6,104	
	Sep	1,774	653	2,149	420	233	5,229	
	Oct	1,782	669	2,234	425	226	5,336	
Ballynahinch Library	Apr	568	224	748	133	24	1,697	19,488
	May	763	421	1,487	254	62	2,987	
	Jun	765	329	1,192	223	40	2,549	
	Jul	858	382	1,483	221	55	2,999	
	Aug	846	362	1,646	216	42	3,112	
	Sep	808	405	1,478	277	58	3,026	
	Oct	779	300	1,658	314	67	3,118	
Banbridge Library	Apr	1,752	593	2,357	342	181	5,225	44,257
	May	1,931	703	2,700	432	174	5,940	
	Jun	1,779	730	2,602	365	160	5,636	
	Jul	2,200	740	3,299	375	214	6,828	
	Aug	2,025	731	3,718	437	260	7,171	
	Sep	1,940	726	3,117	531	267	6,581	
	Oct	2,048	723	3,352	515	238	6,876	
Bangor Carnegie Library	Apr	5,883	1,705	5,676	863	339	14,466	115,101
	May	6,467	1,826	6,196	1,171	327	15,987	
	Jun	6,470	1,896	6,421	892	292	15,971	
	Jul	6,170	1,772	7,394	961	246	16,543	
	Aug	6,583	2,144	8,058	1,177	281	18,243	
	Sep	6,188	2,101	7,094	1,129	239	16,751	
	Oct	5,945	2,054	7,662	1,166	313	17,140	
Bessbrook Library	Apr	1,180	301	1,399	203	88	3,171	17,771
	May	961	278	1,052	210	49	2,550	
	Jun	830	175	1,143	191	47	2,386	
	Jul	770	180	1,133	219	58	2,360	
	Aug	837	130	1,054	199	103	2,323	
	Sep	846	209	1,062	262	86	2,465	
	Oct	839	150	1,227	242	58	2,516	
Broughshane Library	Apr	552	129	460	83	21	1,245	10,459
	May	716	125	604	79	24	1,548	
	Jun	619	127	689	85	21	1,541	
	Jul	684	98	494	96	5	1,377	
	Aug	712	142	754	129	16	1,753	
	Sep	680	104	552	99	17	1,452	
	Oct	647	135	608	130	23	1,543	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Brownlow Library	Apr	875	274	1,221	183	77	2,630	23,624
	May	1,000	309	1,567	275	100	3,251	
	Jun	1,029	335	1,748	301	96	3,509	
	Jul	981	344	1,570	313	74	3,282	
	Aug	1,003	369	1,822	440	145	3,779	
	Sep	1,110	363	1,616	334	91	3,514	
	Oct	1,051	332	1,803	407	66	3,659	
Carnlough Library	Apr	399	151	419	75	25	1,069	9,486
	May	431	195	535	95	17	1,273	
	Jun	463	186	394	80	23	1,146	
	Jul	396	142	358	82	16	994	
	Aug	687	377	481	84	31	1,660	
	Sep	566	279	663	80	26	1,614	
	Oct	674	292	635	106	23	1,730	
Carrickfergus Library	Apr	3,352	1,383	2,167	318	315	7,535	57,489
	May	3,509	1,315	2,460	448	339	8,071	
	Jun	3,524	1,238	2,154	358	251	7,525	
	Jul	3,585	1,321	2,841	404	339	8,490	
	Aug	3,969	1,434	3,027	422	352	9,204	
	Sep	3,609	1,428	2,668	373	305	8,383	
	Oct	3,531	1,341	2,735	334	340	8,281	
Carryduff Library	Apr	442	138	639	135	29	1,383	11,497
	May	466	176	744	142	23	1,551	
	Jun	487	194	906	111	20	1,718	
	Jul	539	121	625	86	22	1,393	
	Aug	607	191	784	86	27	1,695	
	Sep	496	210	822	144	18	1,690	
	Oct	576	138	1,140	189	24	2,067	
Castlederg Library	Apr	499	182	794	157	42	1,674	12,751
	May	489	171	795	215	58	1,728	
	Jun	514	128	803	128	40	1,613	
	Jul	554	129	1,012	103	49	1,847	
	Aug	519	190	983	165	69	1,926	
	Sep	421	193	915	198	42	1,769	
	Oct	497	180	1,168	280	69	2,194	
Castlewellsan Library	Apr	457	178	791	177	92	1,695	12,452
	May	489	131	854	213	56	1,743	
	Jun	457	160	957	224	85	1,883	
	Jul	437	170	811	185	75	1,678	
	Aug	493	119	839	137	91	1,679	
	Sep	559	178	798	205	84	1,824	
	Oct	506	186	966	223	69	1,950	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Central Lending Library Belfast	Apr	2,503	1,240	683	126	185	4,737	37,090
	May	2,823	1,481	881	158	195	5,538	
	Jun	2,910	1,467	897	133	168	5,575	
	Jul	2,634	1,361	1,155	179	155	5,484	
	Aug	2,748	1,449	1,071	118	193	5,579	
	Sep	2,629	1,338	743	150	202	5,062	
	Oct	2,649	1,393	732	133	208	5,115	
Chichester Library	Apr	1,409	353	807	131	101	2,801	21,916
	May	1,497	375	931	143	74	3,020	
	Jun	1,401	476	828	108	60	2,873	
	Jul	1,502	447	1,126	123	106	3,304	
	Aug	1,494	493	1,101	132	170	3,390	
	Sep	1,492	459	1,117	148	132	3,348	
	Oct	1,369	410	1,151	130	120	3,180	
Cloughfern Library	Apr	492	114	439	115	14	1,174	8,739
	May	546	83	533	93	16	1,271	
	Jun	532	94	531	98	22	1,277	
	Jul	512	96	436	71	14	1,129	
	Aug	537	85	577	104	25	1,328	
	Sep	500	68	576	106	31	1,281	
	Oct	527	105	543	85	19	1,279	
Coalisland Library	Apr	757	185	1,062	183	68	2,255	20,529
	May	908	195	1,355	227	87	2,772	
	Jun	880	252	1,271	258	122	2,783	
	Jul	898	244	1,820	306	99	3,367	
	Aug	942	208	1,701	318	79	3,248	
	Sep	853	238	1,605	324	112	3,132	
	Oct	906	238	1,496	217	115	2,972	
Coleraine Library	Apr	2,142	634	1,734	199	211	4,920	40,854
	May	2,272	648	2,106	255	215	5,496	
	Jun	2,362	746	1,921	260	231	5,520	
	Jul	2,374	637	2,908	355	270	6,544	
	Aug	2,470	891	2,909	379	258	6,907	
	Sep	2,384	749	2,072	257	235	5,697	
	Oct	2,360	799	2,102	292	217	5,770	
Colin Glen Library	Apr	992	322	749	134	80	2,277	18,890
	May	1,051	364	1,088	216	71	2,790	
	Jun	1,027	339	993	145	92	2,596	
	Jul	1,049	389	1,072	150	101	2,761	
	Aug	1,143	327	1,069	186	60	2,785	
	Sep	1,121	411	971	202	85	2,790	
Oct	988	423	1,162	228	90	2,891		

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Comber Library	Apr	1,265	285	1,236	158	58	3,002	23,464
	May	1,369	305	1,336	219	76	3,305	
	Jun	1,397	312	1,229	207	61	3,206	
	Jul	1,541	296	1,257	201	67	3,362	
	Aug	1,568	294	1,380	192	59	3,493	
	Sep	1,529	374	1,359	163	38	3,463	
	Oct	1,595	337	1,480	157	64	3,633	
Cookstown Library	Apr	1,719	506	1,901	353	169	4,648	41,242
	May	1,837	660	2,404	459	182	5,542	
	Jun	1,817	687	2,240	328	161	5,233	
	Jul	2,035	637	3,651	527	171	7,021	
	Aug	2,003	703	3,142	508	231	6,587	
	Sep	1,893	677	2,636	564	174	5,944	
	Oct	2,006	768	2,791	493	209	6,267	
Cregagh Library	Apr	1,085	323	1,066	178	35	2,687	24,316
	May	1,281	369	1,331	298	68	3,347	
	Jun	1,339	503	1,446	256	55	3,599	
	Jul	1,197	429	1,546	212	50	3,434	
	Aug	1,303	478	1,819	298	91	3,989	
	Sep	1,263	458	1,619	289	56	3,685	
	Oct	1,272	450	1,536	259	58	3,575	
Creggan Library	Apr	472	131	634	59	19	1,315	10,817
	May	555	123	945	111	29	1,763	
	Jun	552	109	744	59	25	1,489	
	Jul	575	105	483	21	22	1,206	
	Aug	828	149	498	55	15	1,545	
	Sep	463	111	1,005	46	13	1,638	
	Oct	552	150	1,043	91	25	1,861	
Crossmaglen Library	Apr	364	84	582	69	18	1,117	10,598
	May	433	76	719	100	38	1,366	
	Jun	375	118	736	102	50	1,381	
	Jul	487	103	1,013	168	47	1,818	
	Aug	476	98	978	183	44	1,779	
	Sep	465	101	870	123	58	1,617	
	Oct	438	129	771	133	49	1,520	
Crumlin Library	Apr	338	108	410	77	6	939	9,354
	May	394	133	630	176	12	1,345	
	Jun	374	112	607	110	13	1,216	
	Jul	481	112	787	94	14	1,488	
	Aug	525	135	801	123	17	1,601	
	Sep	391	109	715	182	12	1,409	
	Oct	429	153	650	114	10	1,356	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Cushendall Library	Apr	521	106	559	88	19	1,293	9,918
	May	536	132	489	76	13	1,246	
	Jun	560	175	493	87	12	1,327	
	Jul	710	139	624	63	22	1,558	
	Aug	680	166	677	96	24	1,643	
	Sep	657	167	430	68	36	1,358	
	Oct	643	164	563	81	42	1,493	
Derry Central Library	Apr	3,110	1,542	1,727	175	390	6,944	57,110
	May	3,523	1,871	1,979	226	339	7,938	
	Jun	3,507	1,959	2,085	164	352	8,067	
	Jul	3,378	1,772	2,698	235	390	8,473	
	Aug	3,700	1,924	2,727	300	402	9,053	
	Sep	3,541	1,957	2,022	189	365	8,074	
	Oct	3,696	2,006	2,292	262	305	8,561	
Donaghadee Library	Apr	1,589	376	789	128	77	2,959	24,615
	May	1,975	440	1,180	226	53	3,874	
	Jun	1,833	419	929	198	80	3,459	
	Jul	1,904	438	896	122	42	3,402	
	Aug	2,066	478	951	133	30	3,658	
	Sep	1,771	468	1,093	197	46	3,575	
	Oct	1,826	467	1,116	233	46	3,688	
Downpatrick Library	Apr	1,573	495	1,616	188	198	4,070	34,903
	May	1,625	664	1,794	203	210	4,496	
	Jun	1,793	655	2,071	215	219	4,953	
	Jul	1,778	578	2,398	277	217	5,248	
	Aug	1,836	727	2,472	256	252	5,543	
	Sep	1,714	708	2,195	269	181	5,067	
	Oct	1,868	689	2,360	322	287	5,526	
Draperstown Library	Apr	441	189	969	165	18	1,782	8,871
	May	424	119	692	96	19	1,350	
	Jun	398	85	507	48	10	1,048	
	Jul	405	68	654	79	14	1,220	
	Aug	390	85	569	72	11	1,127	
	Sep	387	89	549	66	23	1,114	
	Oct	403	114	607	95	11	1,230	
Dromore Library	Apr	453	95	614	59	45	1,266	9,870
	May	555	129	927	117	33	1,761	
	Jun	502	93	888	128	31	1,642	
	Jul	526	99	944	112	23	1,704	
	Aug	472	122	950	94	34	1,672	
	Sep	315	68	336	47	13	779	
	Oct	385	78	511	60	12	1,046	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Dundonald Library	Apr	1,091	369	865	148	49	2,522	19,425
	May	1,064	338	1,033	240	50	2,725	
	Jun	1,152	380	964	179	44	2,719	
	Jul	1,118	327	1,181	135	34	2,795	
	Aug	1,095	318	1,274	155	55	2,897	
	Sep	1,038	407	1,222	272	36	2,975	
	Oct	1,012	324	1,181	234	41	2,792	
Dungannon Library	Apr	1,600	726	1,888	297	190	4,701	38,339
	May	1,761	813	2,449	391	186	5,600	
	Jun	1,836	866	2,355	390	157	5,604	
	Jul	1,864	873	3,851	570	195	7,353	
	Aug	1,895	1,002	3,320	575	260	7,052	
	Sep	1,783	866	2,196	327	180	5,352	
	Oct	1,046	338	1,064	177	52	2,677	
Dungiven Library	Apr	528	153	982	119	67	1,849	15,461
	May	635	196	1,330	203	80	2,444	
	Jun	590	133	1,134	137	69	2,063	
	Jul	653	194	1,336	169	86	2,438	
	Aug	658	182	1,431	180	84	2,535	
	Sep	580	162	1,075	154	71	2,042	
	Oct	582	156	1,149	140	63	2,090	
Enniskillen Library	Apr	1,515	909	2,060	267	155	4,906	42,476
	May	1,744	1,088	2,259	340	167	5,598	
	Jun	1,779	1,014	2,183	258	156	5,390	
	Jul	1,829	1,069	3,269	365	212	6,744	
	Aug	2,058	1,078	3,311	450	227	7,124	
	Sep	1,992	1,230	2,496	296	151	6,165	
	Oct	2,226	1,291	2,500	393	139	6,549	
Falls Road Library	Apr	382	130	215	46	26	799	11,756
	May	270	61	111	8	26	476	
	Jun	878	442	613	119	74	2,126	
	Jul	783	407	763	128	77	2,158	
	Aug	830	401	637	115	83	2,066	
	Sep	850	360	704	121	65	2,100	
	Oct	862	350	634	100	85	2,031	
Finaghy Library	Apr	1,687	427	1,465	297	166	4,042	33,201
	May	2,011	469	2,031	425	197	5,133	
	Jun	1,908	492	1,776	293	177	4,646	
	Jul	2,114	440	1,585	193	170	4,502	
	Aug	2,280	550	1,967	234	247	5,278	
	Sep	2,001	566	1,789	296	158	4,810	
	Oct	2,014	481	1,814	302	179	4,790	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Fintona Library	Apr	240	48	386	30	4	708	6,013
	May	291	57	420	58	17	843	
	Jun	225	43	442	55	6	771	
	Jul	245	62	578	48	14	947	
	Aug	230	86	502	72	31	921	
	Sep	301	55	529	60	33	978	
	Oct	232	85	462	54	12	845	
Fivemiletown Library	Apr	364	112	735	98	36	1,345	11,801
	May	451	159	810	87	41	1,548	
	Jun	443	105	896	85	41	1,570	
	Jul	441	169	1,077	140	57	1,884	
	Aug	458	138	1,121	118	135	1,970	
	Sep	405	150	977	138	57	1,727	
	Oct	417	154	999	136	51	1,757	
Garvagh Library	Apr	245	62	462	58	21	848	7,380
	May	341	47	547	91	5	1,031	
	Jun	287	61	642	68	12	1,070	
	Jul	287	53	578	72	21	1,011	
	Aug	274	59	616	92	36	1,077	
	Sep	272	53	592	56	29	1,002	
	Oct	352	69	794	74	52	1,341	
Gifford Library	Apr	267	94	310	40	5	716	5,783
	May	299	71	393	84	22	869	
	Jun	248	92	487	67	18	912	
	Jul	256	87	413	54	14	824	
	Aug	371	64	547	59	33	1,074	
	Sep	301	83	297	42	19	742	
	Oct	242	52	307	31	14	646	
Glengormley Library	Apr	3,479	1,114	2,301	387	272	7,553	62,182
	May	3,860	1,300	2,847	530	237	8,774	
	Jun	3,967	1,201	2,852	487	239	8,746	
	Jul	3,977	1,242	3,331	550	286	9,386	
	Aug	3,966	1,144	3,597	670	282	9,659	
	Sep	3,666	1,257	3,116	542	219	8,800	
	Oct	3,802	1,272	3,469	492	229	9,264	
Greenisland Library	Apr	665	160	730	95	29	1,679	12,755
	May	769	218	791	136	23	1,937	
	Jun	650	183	697	82	22	1,634	
	Jul	705	190	817	87	19	1,818	
	Aug	655	209	908	113	19	1,904	
	Sep	655	190	855	146	25	1,871	
	Oct	651	153	953	130	25	1,912	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Greystone Library	Apr	782	218	582	90	30	1,702	11,480
	May	736	179	566	195	25	1,701	
	Jun	820	257	655	145	41	1,918	
	Jul	724	169	458	30	35	1,416	
	Aug	740	159	387	48	49	1,383	
	Sep	729	173	668	87	45	1,702	
	Oct	758	173	572	133	22	1,658	
Grove Library	Apr	826	256	1,018	192	146	2,438	19,512
	May	862	299	1,206	283	164	2,814	
	Jun	920	296	1,303	209	136	2,864	
	Jul	837	257	1,305	236	138	2,773	
	Aug	881	258	1,254	245	249	2,887	
	Sep	923	351	1,312	238	180	3,004	
	Oct	942	284	1,146	201	159	2,732	
Holywood Arches Library	Apr	1,789	412	913	98	146	3,358	28,444
	May	2,069	497	1,216	161	175	4,118	
	Jun	2,055	552	1,180	120	172	4,079	
	Jul	1,930	509	1,435	150	192	4,216	
	Aug	2,088	609	1,484	204	169	4,554	
	Sep	1,895	526	1,363	215	193	4,192	
	Oct	1,820	571	1,184	162	190	3,927	
Holywood Library	Apr	1,040	380	764	73	18	2,275	26,253
	May	1,386	618	1,288	224	96	3,612	
	Jun	1,616	599	1,305	151	113	3,784	
	Jul	1,727	572	1,405	142	105	3,951	
	Aug	1,754	591	1,601	224	168	4,338	
	Sep	1,655	607	1,511	202	173	4,148	
	Oct	1,590	632	1,635	146	142	4,145	
Irish and Local Studies Library	Apr	0	0	2	0	2	4	44
	May	0	0	0	0	1	1	
	Jun	0	1	4	0	0	5	
	Jul	1	3	0	0	5	9	
	Aug	0	5	0	0	2	7	
	Sep	0	1	3	2	0	6	
	Oct	6	4	0	0	2	12	
Irvinestown Library	Apr	832	169	869	134	40	2,044	15,112
	May	812	222	920	82	41	2,077	
	Jun	863	214	902	110	46	2,135	
	Jul	957	216	1,115	172	72	2,532	
	Aug	837	200	1,232	137	90	2,496	
	Sep	713	190	726	92	56	1,777	
	Oct	760	180	946	100	65	2,051	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Keady Library	Apr	529	170	906	69	58	1,732	13,865
	May	358	130	793	109	68	1,458	
	Jun	455	221	971	126	79	1,852	
	Jul	432	134	1,066	117	74	1,823	
	Aug	663	220	1,184	206	102	2,375	
	Sep	505	166	978	125	77	1,851	
	Oct	849	330	1,377	144	74	2,774	
Kells & Connor Library	Apr	329	162	486	57	11	1,045	6,175
	May	340	118	468	29	7	962	
	Jun	325	115	367	25	6	838	
	Jul	282	71	332	34	6	725	
	Aug	299	93	427	43	14	876	
	Sep	296	84	369	37	7	793	
	Oct	336	68	443	79	10	936	
Kilkeel Library	Apr	1,103	301	1,346	234	128	3,112	26,613
	May	1,223	317	1,742	400	112	3,794	
	Jun	1,108	284	1,342	253	134	3,121	
	Jul	1,107	391	2,131	342	155	4,126	
	Aug	1,324	371	2,304	416	197	4,612	
	Sep	1,157	337	1,560	323	120	3,497	
	Oct	1,302	522	2,012	389	126	4,351	
Killyleagh Library	Apr	470	141	317	87	31	1,046	9,439
	May	466	122	301	127	24	1,040	
	Jun	505	144	429	81	39	1,198	
	Jul	575	217	385	60	31	1,268	
	Aug	688	263	544	102	57	1,654	
	Sep	550	234	541	120	55	1,500	
	Oct	630	214	688	157	44	1,733	
Kilrea Library	Apr	411	136	446	49	23	1,065	9,028
	May	384	118	552	80	23	1,157	
	Jun	423	111	550	66	26	1,176	
	Jul	488	116	799	73	34	1,510	
	Aug	394	121	758	62	49	1,384	
	Sep	401	147	534	84	32	1,198	
	Oct	419	145	825	105	44	1,538	
Larne Library	Apr	2,440	801	1,204	160	298	4,903	38,352
	May	2,667	970	1,469	261	334	5,701	
	Jun	2,377	811	1,359	175	309	5,031	
	Jul	2,781	767	1,767	209	276	5,800	
	Aug	2,564	837	1,756	230	340	5,727	
	Sep	2,368	947	1,765	243	288	5,611	
	Oct	2,304	925	1,853	247	250	5,579	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Limavady Library	Apr	1,637	403	1,943	195	201	4,379	37,471
	May	1,938	500	2,125	196	212	4,971	
	Jun	1,803	479	2,467	202	195	5,146	
	Jul	1,890	520	2,978	276	241	5,905	
	Aug	1,995	490	2,794	282	283	5,844	
	Sep	1,871	527	2,619	343	226	5,586	
	Oct	1,890	522	2,636	364	228	5,640	
Lisburn City Library	Apr	3,552	1,862	4,556	599	332	10,901	91,003
	May	3,904	2,066	5,455	830	317	12,572	
	Jun	3,709	2,023	5,490	707	357	12,286	
	Jul	3,696	2,108	6,954	826	348	13,932	
	Aug	4,124	2,304	6,901	829	408	14,566	
	Sep	3,692	2,349	5,811	691	373	12,916	
	Oct	3,887	2,362	6,338	825	418	13,830	
Lisburn Road Library	Apr	1,680	447	1,437	168	93	3,825	28,854
	May	1,887	441	1,452	197	84	4,061	
	Jun	1,870	478	1,388	137	111	3,984	
	Jul	1,922	505	1,447	152	87	4,113	
	Aug	1,781	538	1,521	198	111	4,149	
	Sep	1,841	486	1,775	243	85	4,430	
	Oct	1,871	552	1,550	208	111	4,292	
Lisnaskea Library	Apr	389	264	811	73	65	1,602	14,204
	May	393	323	1,161	107	105	2,089	
	Jun	408	226	930	123	40	1,727	
	Jul	408	260	1,304	183	110	2,265	
	Aug	481	331	1,537	200	123	2,672	
	Sep	396	264	1,008	101	66	1,835	
	Oct	449	289	1,099	129	48	2,014	
Lurgan Library	Apr	2,581	746	2,169	290	157	5,943	50,742
	May	3,029	935	2,434	508	182	7,088	
	Jun	2,890	804	2,397	426	173	6,690	
	Jul	3,085	938	3,479	462	155	8,119	
	Aug	2,955	909	3,293	497	190	7,844	
	Sep	2,781	903	2,989	590	160	7,423	
	Oct	2,828	844	3,194	586	183	7,635	
Maghera Library	Apr	980	246	1,204	183	68	2,681	21,978
	May	1,047	342	1,361	217	55	3,022	
	Jun	999	294	1,377	208	69	2,947	
	Jul	1,192	316	1,793	205	74	3,580	
	Aug	1,024	318	1,674	208	66	3,290	
	Sep	988	354	1,496	352	59	3,249	
	Oct	1,038	329	1,544	240	58	3,209	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Magherafelt Library	Apr	1,240	426	1,978	351	207	4,202	35,504
	May	1,384	432	2,525	466	227	5,034	
	Jun	1,330	456	2,233	345	218	4,582	
	Jul	1,478	476	2,703	345	274	5,276	
	Aug	1,545	401	2,775	436	282	5,439	
	Sep	1,420	559	2,676	548	213	5,416	
	Oct	1,422	475	2,901	550	207	5,555	
Moirá Library	Apr	407	78	800	114	8	1,407	13,056
	May	567	130	1,352	264	5	2,318	
	Jun	476	93	1,027	173	21	1,790	
	Jul	521	95	1,042	136	16	1,810	
	Aug	443	94	1,053	104	7	1,701	
	Sep	452	120	1,280	228	21	2,101	
	Oct	404	110	1,212	190	13	1,929	
Money more Library	Apr	336	99	408	91	35	969	6,870
	May	337	55	443	85	44	964	
	Jun	313	50	457	84	29	933	
	Jul	382	53	474	117	36	1,062	
	Aug	343	55	388	82	26	894	
	Sep	297	63	554	102	34	1,050	
	Oct	336	60	486	89	27	998	
Moy Library	Apr	555	117	839	224	70	1,805	9,091
	May	441	68	638	161	39	1,347	
	Jun	365	71	575	82	36	1,129	
	Jul	404	105	767	101	51	1,428	
	Aug	306	39	617	93	42	1,097	
	Sep	311	49	557	116	43	1,076	
	Oct	275	89	676	120	49	1,209	
Newcastle Library	Apr	1,556	527	1,255	191	181	3,710	30,429
	May	1,669	637	1,623	296	156	4,381	
	Jun	1,648	580	1,468	252	140	4,088	
	Jul	1,885	647	1,666	204	172	4,574	
	Aug	1,860	687	1,739	231	195	4,712	
	Sep	1,738	750	1,455	272	163	4,378	
	Oct	1,710	635	1,748	284	209	4,586	
Newry Library	Apr	338	77	199	30	16	660	45,848
	May	1,963	909	2,171	293	227	5,563	
	Jun	2,795	1,054	2,793	287	249	7,178	
	Jul	2,861	1,126	4,041	481	346	8,855	
	Aug	2,789	1,104	3,834	429	265	8,421	
	Sep	2,795	1,192	3,151	293	259	7,690	
	Oct	2,659	1,162	3,057	336	267	7,481	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Newtownards Library	Apr	2,192	628	1,568	230	80	4,698	36,470
	May	2,421	690	1,572	273	84	5,040	
	Jun	2,488	637	1,480	281	123	5,009	
	Jul	2,385	590	1,764	211	80	5,030	
	Aug	2,776	716	2,045	224	105	5,866	
	Sep	2,582	677	2,002	251	78	5,590	
	Oct	2,557	621	1,686	276	97	5,237	
Newtownbreda Library	Apr	1,605	412	1,673	204	95	3,989	34,782
	May	1,718	466	2,159	355	156	4,854	
	Jun	1,762	474	2,268	265	107	4,876	
	Jul	1,694	502	2,189	287	76	4,748	
	Aug	1,837	549	2,595	371	153	5,505	
	Sep	1,688	550	2,509	372	112	5,231	
	Oct	1,735	547	2,821	383	93	5,579	
Newtownstewart Library	Apr	250	46	381	81	3	761	5,716
	May	300	98	445	91	4	938	
	Jun	241	67	378	57	6	749	
	Jul	273	57	451	47	9	837	
	Aug	222	69	490	59	13	853	
	Sep	221	85	402	59	12	779	
	Oct	199	69	459	63	9	799	
Omagh Library	Apr	2,850	1,453	3,905	562	340	9,110	77,036
	May	3,243	1,675	4,363	546	393	10,220	
	Jun	3,213	1,735	4,272	606	329	10,155	
	Jul	3,370	1,661	6,620	812	403	12,866	
	Aug	3,439	1,677	6,498	898	524	13,036	
	Sep	2,924	1,725	4,676	583	394	10,302	
	Oct	3,016	1,772	5,461	690	408	11,347	
Ormeau Road Library	Apr	1,465	721	1,208	218	198	3,810	32,365
	May	1,727	807	1,454	315	209	4,512	
	Jun	1,763	850	1,286	273	137	4,309	
	Jul	1,731	857	1,612	226	197	4,623	
	Aug	1,833	940	1,766	319	303	5,161	
	Sep	1,756	888	1,696	346	238	4,924	
	Oct	1,798	872	1,763	372	221	5,026	
Portadown Library	Apr	2,147	619	1,861	281	188	5,096	41,550
	May	2,434	752	1,924	302	190	5,602	
	Jun	2,498	768	2,252	339	186	6,043	
	Jul	2,353	606	2,760	360	188	6,267	
	Aug	2,568	811	2,800	457	297	6,933	
	Sep	2,412	742	1,965	346	177	5,642	
	Oct	2,413	708	2,298	366	182	5,967	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Portaferry Library	Apr	597	151	514	64	16	1,342	11,830
	May	668	180	652	103	21	1,624	
	Jun	698	190	548	74	22	1,532	
	Jul	737	174	794	102	36	1,843	
	Aug	629	160	776	109	40	1,714	
	Sep	672	231	825	130	78	1,936	
	Oct	735	204	741	116	43	1,839	
Portlennone Library	Apr	319	78	554	75	10	1,036	9,060
	May	348	91	757	83	14	1,293	
	Jun	379	63	692	58	11	1,203	
	Jul	403	70	835	81	22	1,411	
	Aug	409	74	918	73	18	1,492	
	Sep	410	65	725	95	28	1,323	
	Oct	365	93	748	74	22	1,302	
Portrush Library	Apr	937	211	557	41	69	1,815	14,707
	May	897	215	570	71	79	1,832	
	Jun	940	201	513	53	65	1,772	
	Jul	1,087	210	1,048	118	100	2,563	
	Aug	1,003	244	924	104	120	2,395	
	Sep	971	252	681	88	90	2,082	
	Oct	973	228	843	106	98	2,248	
Portstewart Library	Apr	804	284	700	48	89	1,925	17,229
	May	870	291	796	93	83	2,133	
	Jun	973	315	750	109	90	2,237	
	Jul	1,118	354	1,281	178	154	3,085	
	Aug	1,099	315	1,307	182	166	3,069	
	Sep	903	328	849	100	107	2,287	
	Oct	954	324	1,006	107	102	2,493	
Randalstown Library	Apr	724	127	652	62	32	1,597	13,496
	May	813	171	831	87	30	1,932	
	Jun	808	117	726	86	28	1,765	
	Jul	881	119	901	81	29	2,011	
	Aug	920	147	1,044	120	52	2,283	
	Sep	724	145	770	118	42	1,799	
	Oct	891	138	941	107	32	2,109	
Rathcoole Library	Apr	979	256	537	94	81	1,947	14,491
	May	1,114	325	546	73	91	2,149	
	Jun	992	300	589	88	70	2,039	
	Jul	1,067	306	611	112	67	2,163	
	Aug	1,060	335	648	158	57	2,258	
	Sep	887	241	531	110	105	1,874	
	Oct	946	338	597	98	82	2,061	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Rathfriland Library	Apr	503	124	708	192	19	1,546	12,813
	May	477	163	911	212	33	1,796	
	Jun	400	109	829	155	24	1,517	
	Jul	483	133	935	194	37	1,782	
	Aug	433	166	1,161	178	57	1,995	
	Sep	449	133	1,018	181	30	1,811	
	Oct	501	167	1,360	293	45	2,366	
Richhill Library	Apr	390	135	562	57	29	1,173	9,639
	May	494	177	764	115	26	1,576	
	Jun	472	158	585	64	20	1,299	
	Jul	477	120	872	120	36	1,625	
	Aug	433	132	691	96	28	1,380	
	Sep	417	114	647	54	29	1,261	
	Oct	375	168	669	84	29	1,325	
Saintfield Library	Apr	554	141	685	94	42	1,516	13,888
	May	703	167	933	217	44	2,064	
	Jun	608	199	857	163	31	1,858	
	Jul	628	172	899	96	33	1,828	
	Aug	692	208	994	167	43	2,104	
	Sep	768	292	1,079	228	58	2,425	
	Oct	654	214	982	190	53	2,093	
Shankill Road Library	Apr	666	93	225	36	10	1,030	11,536
	May	647	78	199	9	7	940	
	Jun	852	231	486	70	96	1,735	
	Jul	955	270	495	95	43	1,858	
	Aug	1,045	301	603	83	78	2,110	
	Sep	893	290	554	119	66	1,922	
	Oct	997	240	534	107	63	1,941	
Shantallow Library	Apr	886	238	1,404	236	70	2,834	21,459
	May	1,179	248	1,467	247	65	3,206	
	Jun	1,052	287	1,186	122	42	2,689	
	Jul	1,162	277	1,424	124	55	3,042	
	Aug	1,109	242	1,531	136	56	3,074	
	Sep	1,196	358	1,590	262	64	3,470	
	Oct	1,082	262	1,541	194	65	3,144	
Strabane Library	Apr	1,568	285	1,991	236	78	4,158	31,527
	May	1,756	448	2,037	304	109	4,654	
	Jun	1,680	338	1,830	247	106	4,201	
	Jul	1,625	398	2,311	352	102	4,788	
	Aug	1,713	426	2,158	289	131	4,717	
	Sep	1,697	490	1,908	218	86	4,399	
	Oct	1,646	441	2,144	249	130	4,610	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Strathfoyle Library	Apr	238	70	890	221	40	1,459	9,377
	May	317	85	775	140	37	1,354	
	Jun	266	99	887	175	26	1,453	
	Jul	252	89	718	90	45	1,194	
	Aug	223	60	758	95	46	1,182	
	Sep	242	84	852	141	39	1,358	
	Oct	201	67	903	187	19	1,377	
Suffolk Library	Apr	893	343	674	97	91	2,098	19,349
	May	1,072	391	920	143	113	2,639	
	Jun	1,162	353	936	149	76	2,676	
	Jul	1,089	371	1,035	153	133	2,781	
	Aug	1,216	507	1,000	216	169	3,108	
	Sep	1,123	383	1,199	205	134	3,044	
	Oct	1,123	392	1,128	245	115	3,003	
Tandragee Library	Apr	656	154	973	238	54	2,075	15,522
	May	634	138	1,194	340	37	2,343	
	Jun	644	151	1,099	192	47	2,133	
	Jul	735	166	1,143	155	41	2,240	
	Aug	721	176	1,130	211	72	2,310	
	Sep	647	229	826	172	45	1,919	
	Oct	661	249	1,233	305	54	2,502	
Tullycarnet Library	Apr	901	269	416	50	60	1,696	13,763
	May	958	288	639	98	75	2,058	
	Jun	931	276	540	68	58	1,873	
	Jul	1,013	265	663	76	51	2,068	
	Aug	952	295	697	112	102	2,158	
	Sep	923	277	629	91	56	1,976	
	Oct	849	255	670	96	64	1,934	
Warrenpoint Library	Apr	1,596	512	1,834	232	140	4,314	29,855
	May	1,454	454	2,076	302	114	4,400	
	Jun	1,416	474	1,662	207	103	3,862	
	Jul	1,457	447	2,218	253	134	4,509	
	Aug	1,579	437	2,368	278	158	4,820	
	Sep	1,322	436	1,892	178	137	3,965	
	Oct	1,363	447	1,777	255	143	3,985	
Waterside Library	Apr	2,061	686	2,428	320	168	5,663	46,660
	May	2,416	824	2,737	357	272	6,606	
	Jun	2,306	711	2,754	377	244	6,392	
	Jul	2,415	674	3,605	446	229	7,369	
	Aug	2,548	761	3,277	391	194	7,171	
	Sep	2,422	855	2,879	346	225	6,727	
	Oct	2,339	771	3,014	434	174	6,732	

Library Location	Month	Adult Fiction	Adult Non-Fiction	Junior Fiction	Junior Non-Fiction	Other	Total	Branch Total
Whitehead Library	Apr	1,022	339	460	77	39	1,937	15,940
	May	1,160	501	653	82	24	2,420	
	Jun	976	327	554	110	32	1,999	
	Jul	1,175	373	638	112	21	2,319	
	Aug	1,212	414	702	125	46	2,499	
	Sep	1,042	409	663	165	50	2,329	
	Oct	1,099	437	747	129	25	2,437	
Whiterock Library	Apr	206	81	339	78	5	709	8,270
	May	441	181	615	120	14	1,371	
	Jun	406	154	495	66	12	1,133	
	Jul	420	147	330	79	7	983	
	Aug	456	227	577	124	11	1,395	
	Sep	438	216	507	114	29	1,304	
	Oct	288	189	746	140	12	1,375	
Woodstock Road Library	Apr	1,556	320	682	118	32	2,708	20,397
	May	1,650	356	750	157	38	2,951	
	Jun	1,545	320	763	147	31	2,806	
	Jul	1,682	356	812	136	39	3,025	
	Aug	1,749	354	769	179	53	3,104	
	Sep	1,493	379	691	149	60	2,772	
	Oct	1,453	414	987	143	34	3,031	
Grand Total		909,420	313,833	1,012,196	149,269	76,924	2,461,642	2,461,642

(ii) Public Access Terminals April 2010 – March 2011 Annex C

Library	April 2010 - March 2011												Grand Total
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	
Antrim Library	2,718	2,656	2,858	3,075	3,216	2,976	3,347	3,206	1,989	2,899	3,213	3,630	35,783
Ardoyne Library	791	816	1,061	876	1,014	1,025	954	1,118	735	902	1,110	1,224	11,626
Armagh Library	3,017	3,144	2,983	2,652	2,935	3,079	2,929	3,014	2,280	2,806	2,678	2,901	34,418
Ballycastle Library	613	584	680	742	726	708	800	758	620	711	637	676	8,255
Ballyclare Library	672	767	729	637	661	791	840	830	482	739	730	872	8,750
Ballyhackamore Library	726	614	687	678	788	923	776	691	471	744	732	964	8,794
Ballymena Central Library	4,378	4,022	4,250	4,058	4,667	4,478	4,089	3,674	2,597	3,676	3,902	4,668	48,459
Ballymoney Library	1,471	1,555	1,459	1,424	1,426	1,538	1,332	1,341	778	1,300	1,285	1,395	16,304
Ballynahinch Library	626	551	576	662	629	708	648	719	478				5,597
Banbridge Library	2,200	2,084	2,155	2,105	2,414	2,635	2,633	2,506	1,621	2,480	2,354	2,608	27,795
Bangor Carnegie Library	4,926	4,433	4,399	4,984	5,081	4,972	5,143	5,392	3,473	4,826	5,052	5,590	58,271
Belfast Central Library	10,771	9,532	10,730	11,198	12,850	12,179	11,983	12,409	8,907	11,658	12,601	13,763	138,581
Bessbrook Library	232	231	222	249	244	236	244	308	219	805	899	756	4,645
Broughshane Library	99	105	121	123	153	138	123	134	96	133	142	142	1,509
Brownlow Library	1,113	1,220	1,088	1,177	1,128	1,236	1,251	1,089	735	968	1,094	1,159	13,258
Carnlow Library	122	134	176	239	187	174	150	183	129	114	178	175	1,961
Carriockfergus Library	2,781	2,560	1,799	2,547	2,875	2,968	2,742	2,566	2,003	2,578	2,638	2,825	30,882
Carryduff Library	11	197	227	287	245	249	221	239	163	269	310	237	2,655
Castlederg Library	672	573	725	735	865	811	783	741	496	626	685	672	8,384
Castlewells Library	311	390	344	326	315	352	416	389	272	363	404	422	4,304
Chichester Library	970	959	942	844	855	913	793	690	447	796	736	798	9,743
Cloughfern Library	117	133	153	216	260	120	218	150	142	179	234	232	2,154
Coalisland Library	724	719	743	775	887	777	855	756	439	640	729	892	8,936
Coleraine Library	3,375	3,309	3,445	3,195	3,580	3,720	3,600	3,553	2,466	3,266	3,391	3,467	40,367
Colin Glen Library	1,366	1,484	1,412	1,548	2,006	2,015	2,091	2,194	1,327	1,690	1,759	1,991	20,883
Comber Library		272	438	443	502	611	524	465	282	596	637	716	5,486
Cookstown Library	3,125	2,978	3,135	2,962	3,157	3,458	3,334	2,921	1,925	2,769	3,102	3,177	36,043
Cregagh Library	745	702	714	665	821	951	922	905	560	719	693	865	9,262
Creggan Library	462	449	607	665	823	703	732	718	398	514	411	485	6,967
Crossmaglen Library	330	359	389	408	426	437	375	341	214	304	291	287	4,161
Crumlin Library	284	284	280	267	258	221	284	301	148	174	211	223	2,935
Cushendall Library	133	180	194	290	287	178	208	178	133	140	147	170	2,238
Derry Central Library	7,150	7,217	7,606	7,373	8,379	8,975	8,719	8,647	5,347	7,333	7,976	8,973	93,695
Donaghadee Library	691	633	660	768	844	837	866	772	498	617	749	738	8,673

Library	April 2010 - March 2011												Grand Total
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	
Downpatrick Library	3,088	3,341	3,211	3,047	2,917	3,441	3,301	3,334	2,148	3,233	3,275	3,289	37,625
Draperstown Library	159	207	174	192	192	215	190	216	129	148	194	254	2,270
Dromore Library	306	341	345	293	332	381	354	320	210	274	330	403	3,889
Dundonald Library	725	686	777	693	797	901	804	792	456	723	756	826	8,936
Dungannon Library	5,332	4,926	4,406	4,399	5,131	5,350	5,771	5,405	3,919	4,319	3,734	3,744	56,436
Dungiven Library	211	254	282	283	296	271	363	422	256	438	473	671	4,220
Enniskillen Library	3,890	3,719	3,878	3,681	3,772	4,113	3,631	3,808	2,706	3,542	3,689	4,081	44,510
Falls Road Library	986	989	1,035	1,140	1,183	1,154	1,108	1,098	824	940	428	393	11,278
Finaghy Library	1,160	1,149	1,074	1,046	1,052	1,324	1,223	1,200	792	855	1,109	1,299	13,283
Fintona Library	337	244	300	373	429	329	321	286	235	232	303	304	3,693
Fivemiletown Library	640	659	674	670	567	452	622	683	359	552	414	529	6,821
Garvagh Library	41	48	58	116	82	76	81	82	64	74	86	96	904
Gilford Library	101	104	138	142	131	143	152	141	69	86	86	155	1,362
Glengormley Library	2,347	2,162	2,254	2,214	2,495	2,487	2,419	2,414	1,376	2,054	2,039	2,511	26,772
Greenisland Library	506	581	532	439	661	698	786	809	502	608	602	528	7,252
Greystone Library	683	588	730	824	782	547	623	667	495	486	609	687	7,721
Grove Library	736	825	719	965	957	940	983	917	639	890	1,008	977	10,556
Hollywood Arches Library	1,615	1,398	1,566	1,556	1,619	1,840	1,633	1,576	1,003	1,476	1,664	1,711	18,657
Hollywood Library	1,224	971	1,199	1,701	1,696	1,584	1,744	1,609	1,090	525	651	666	14,660
Irish & Local Studies Library	135	204	184	116	126	168	152	202	83	238	167	197	1,972
Irvinestown Library	252	287	294	293	425	401	356	400	284	404	438	504	4,338
Keady Library		92	506	611	548	561	736	776	512	781	811	739	6,673
Kells & Connor Library	73	113	104	171	184	157	185	244	193	257	278	299	2,258
Kilkeel Library	579	504	626	721	704	632	673	593	353	602	662	709	7,358
Killyleagh Library	211	213	233	255	267	348	288	286	191	227	262	262	3,043
Kilrea Library	139	159	152	162	155	202	213	199	95	151	152	174	1,953
Larne Library	1,861	1,786	2,016	1,846	1,999	2,296	2,160	2,539	1,530	1,851	1,886	2,091	23,861
Limavady Library	2,362	2,100	2,368	2,330	2,368	2,658	2,283	2,292	1,601	2,101	2,140	2,343	26,946
Lisburn Library	5,956	5,995	5,881	5,699	6,157	7,005	6,822	7,089	4,070	6,216	6,452	7,392	74,734
Lisburn Road Library	394	427	448	462	546	513	489	465	376	521	474	497	5,612
Lisnaskea Library	533	522	573	529	612	472	550	506	373	493	578	591	6,332
Lurgan Library	3,287	3,379	3,524	3,183	3,520	3,595	3,914	3,500	2,591	3,156	3,352	3,672	40,673
Maghera Library	709	752	852	940	920	996	923	839	575	826	866	856	10,054
Magherafelt Library	2,641	2,967	3,383	2,826	2,975	3,527	3,287	3,072	2,089	2,702	2,620	2,621	34,710

Library	April 2010 - March 2011												Grand Total
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	
Moir Library	129	123	162	134	125	140	121	127	58	81	93	119	1,412
Moneymore Library	93	184	183	131	230	137	176	175	77	116	150	150	1,802
Moy Library	77	90	95	108	97	109	117	89	72	123	103	129	1,209
Newcastle Library	1,465	1,393	1,532	2,084	1,934	1,721	1,451	1,491	1,323	1,461	1,504	1,661	19,020
Newry Library	4,298	4,092	4,422	4,151	4,710	4,524	4,406	4,060	2,597				37,260
Newtownards Library	1,167	1,154	1,239	1,072	1,190	1,307	1,253	1,216	877	1,250	1,151	1,302	14,178
Newtownbreda Library	607	598	652	665	792	794	742	701	518	581	637	662	7,949
Newtownstewart Library	244	200	222	219	259	250	346	359	118	165	398	352	3,132
Omagh Library	5,036	5,305	5,384	5,228	6,052	6,339	5,261	4,777	3,507	4,968	4,837	5,396	62,090
Ormeau Road Library	2,506	2,166	2,406	2,901	3,141	2,933	2,813	2,795	1,216	2,427	2,610	3,140	31,054
Portadown Library	2,637	2,403	2,715	2,617	2,918	3,346	3,639	3,408	2,598	3,300	3,659	3,972	37,212
Portaferry Library	388	343	437	437	711	581	627	501	593	427	461	323	5,829
Portlengone Library	127	145	114	120	121	110	129	97	64	82	104	101	1,314
Portrush Library	1,141	1,029	1,257	1,588	1,462	1,351	1,299	1,248	1,014	1,165	1,250	1,360	15,164
Portstewart Library	996	757	881	1,133	1,114	951	923	794	530	623	834	944	10,480
Randalstown Library	329	435	363	410	565	506	586	482	398	448	499	656	5,677
Rathcoole Library	985	1,112	1,337	1,275	1,338	1,219	1,106	924	704	887	992	1,093	12,972
Rathfriland Library	215	250	328	304	277	340	284	231	148	165	183	190	2,915
Richhill Library	399	393	386	283	298	368	426	375	286	346	312	438	4,310
Saintfield Library	334	283	282	266	270	301	345	331	192	269	341	393	3,607
Shankill Road Library	1,323	1,215	1,302	1,392	1,450	1,485	1,839	1,839	1,395	1,495	541	423	15,699
Shantallow Library	1,003	975	1,109	1,010	1,149	1,419	1,473	1,291	915	1,047	1,169	1,178	13,738
Strabane Library	2,084	2,213	2,503	2,461	2,766	2,816	2,777	2,427	1,618	2,388	2,425	2,603	29,081
Strathfoyle Library	651	637	621	666	888	823	971	893	521	561	553	624	8,409
Suffolk Road Library	741	663	762	817	1,001	1,038	920	952	697	918	832	1,082	10,423
Tandragee Library	389	393	320	438	317	372	432	417	228	332	463	464	4,565
Tullycarnet Library	588	515	669	842	1,008	652	483	505	299	438	683	612	7,294
Warrenpoint Library	1,055	1,056	1,254	1,064	1,338	1,242	1,297	1,341	883	1,351	1,382	1,457	14,720
Waterside Library	1,731	1,671	1,608	1,529	1,686	1,708	1,752	1,675	1,001	1,532	1,743	1,879	19,515
Whitehead Library	374	452	521	444	545	596	614	515	366	480	487	542	5,936
Whiterock Library	620	554	638	601	635	760	713	599	355	241		1	5,717
Woodstock Road Library	902	998	1,017	923	1,047	1,048	732	687	426	637	773	861	10,051
Grand Total	135,575	132,335	139,204	140,424	153,535	157,155	154,118	150,001	100,652	130,533	135,467	147,871	1,676,870

(ii) **Public Access Terminals April 2011 – October 2011****Annex D**

April 2011 - October 2011							
April	May	June	July	August	September	October	Grand Total
2,787	2,900	2,987	2,445	2,462	2,491	2,513	18,585
963	963	798	580	829	960	1,042	6,135
2,673	3,219	2,989	2,331	2,795	2,792	2,971	19,770
579	667	696	758	698	748	623	4,769
698	839	873	721	750	775	942	5,598
709	784	825	797	872	889	873	5,749
3,760	4,343	4,402	3,860	4,327	4,315	4,329	29,336
1,148	1,465	1,348	1,285	1,457	1,470	1,482	9,655
251	629	584	431	582	664	651	3,792
1,977	2,757	2,398	2,294	2,466	2,624	2,527	17,043
4,401	4,836	5,061	4,256	4,939	5,062	4,873	33,428
11,608	13,049	12,923	11,542	11,995	11,714	11,440	84,271
640	436	313	233	242	323	366	2,553
114	125	137	114	136	102	127	855
904	1,121	1,060	908	997	1,228	1,195	7,413
147	131	122	132	137	106	172	947
3,285	3,531	3,283	2,842	3,496	3,404	3,271	23,112
183	166	207	148	136	214	195	1,249
601	709	583	454	616	588	426	3,977
332	366	397	244	277	338	379	2,333
683	710	751	765	710	815	779	5,213
161	191	213	116	111	143	177	1,112
727	679	655	654	766	672	699	4,852
2,956	3,192	3,368	3,127	3,426	3,276	3,465	22,810
1,305	1,873	2,031	1,463	1,880	1,880	1,995	12,427
518	590	620	486	470	616	579	3,879
2,801	3,210	3,279	2,898	3,013	2,995	3,246	21,442
543	722	761	740	778	845	739	5,128
350	488	571	457	497	540	497	3,400
209	329	379	334	327	326	263	2,167
152	210	177	230	252	214	256	1,491
189	185	177	271	254	141	131	1,348
7,214	8,276	8,498	7,325	7,662	8,286	7,719	54,980
519	551	611	600	603	696	709	4,289
2,692	3,319	3,456	2,666	2,750	3,083	2,964	20,930
190	261	244	214	212	202	200	1,523
303	328	377	269	262			1,539
675	805	811	737	860	887	788	5,563
3,262	3,687	3,279	3,345	4,036	3,723	911	22,243
321	520	458	346	496	458	454	3,053
3,547	3,878	3,894	3,489	4,026	3,763	3,615	26,212
190	133	857	953	1,216	1,261	1,228	5,838
916	1,212	1,257	942	1,083	1,266	1,223	7,899
243	291	293	283	255	322	223	1,910
571	708	734	768	685	536	637	4,639
90	133	107	78	69	110	101	688

April 2011 - October 2011							
April	May	June	July	August	September	October	Grand Total
106	201	216	177	232	169	142	1,243
1,890	2,382	2,387	1,793	2,137	2,130	2,298	15,017
437	681	473	502	748	751	858	4,450
583	571	655	480	463	484	535	3,771
676	862	770	652	728	748	746	5,182
1,424	1,578	1,750	1,504	1,764	1,728	1,749	11,497
554	1,142	1,428	975	1,171	1,305	1,234	7,809
191	278	243	255	183	225	194	1,569
449	449	456	395	462	320	282	2,813
664	846	969	1,011	916	891	1,053	6,350
241	276	184	181	227	219	212	1,540
569	634	665	689	814	694	722	4,787
172	205	218	145	165	212	187	1,304
99	120	136	148	153	196	230	1,082
1,693	1,798	1,905	1,735	1,842	2,205	2,053	13,231
2,092	2,220	2,283	2,035	2,363	2,775	2,439	16,207
5,884	6,782	5,967	4,700	5,529	6,489	6,110	41,461
455	493	544	497	499	426	448	3,362
471	556	539	517	586	479	519	3,667
2,872	3,586	3,377	2,872	3,261	2,947	3,071	21,986
795	792	802	715	929	864	975	5,872
2,363	2,547	2,423	1,887	2,342	2,878	2,973	17,413
99	88	97	94	71	99	82	630
110	132	108	110	136	119	117	832
106	123	120	101	92	70	129	741
1,425	1,552	1,888	1,791	1,922	1,696	1,626	11,900
	2,612	3,827	3,250	3,337	3,854	3,718	20,598
1,145	1,270	1,247	1,027	1,191	1,229	1,180	8,289
627	706	608	621	751	593	627	4,533
367	336	350	447	572	376	378	2,826
4,546	5,473	5,548	4,941	5,559	5,262	5,371	36,700
2,283	2,730	2,708	2,519	2,949	2,697	2,772	18,658
3,216	3,139	2,945	2,600	3,046	3,023	3,080	21,049
375	401	514	374	392	413	380	2,849
67	95	103	107	103	102	101	678
1,168	1,329	1,330	1,502	1,538	1,178	1,147	9,192
869	806	797	1,035	1,117	951	864	6,439
430	509	492	368	403	476	401	3,079
808	1,003	1,052	1,029	1,285	1,020	1,363	7,560
137	198	204	150	120	185	226	1,220
300	368	337	289	443	344	246	2,327
245	276	252	250	213	350	327	1,913
339	285	897	1,280	1,631	1,405	1,351	7,188
846	1,247	1,096	1,013	1,113	1,378	1,310	8,003
2,018	2,456	2,513	2,344	2,491	2,280	2,327	16,429
532	538	638	687	776	637	861	4,669
898	957	928	824	1,097	971	1,094	6,769

April 2011 - October 2011							
April	May	June	July	August	September	October	Grand Total
469	277	370	353	438	399	504	2,810
493	610	629	593	700	439	440	3,904
1,206	1,195	1,027	974	1,117	1,029	1,082	7,630
1,517	1,732	1,685	1,387	1,442	1,767	1,655	11,185
414	433	412	377	411	415	395	2,857
286	568	591	530	553	584	751	3,863
807	952	939	767	910	785	861	6,021
121,915	142,912	144,486	127,530	142,341	143,124	139,791	962,099

Portavoe Reservoir

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the impact of the proposed sale of Portavoe Reservoir on fishing in the area.

(AQW 5069/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: NI Water owns Portavoe Reservoir and has informed the Department of its intention to sell the facility. DCAL is not aware of the current position on the sale, but the water will remain part of the Public Angling Estate until it is sold.

NI Water has also advised the Department that Portavoe will be closed from January 2012 for essential maintenance work, which will require the reservoir to be drained. The Department has already publicised this and advised anglers intending to buy DCAL permits for 2012 that the water will be closed.

Portavoe is a popular water and DCAL Inland Fisheries Group is currently giving consideration other waters which may be suitable to augment Public Angling Estate provision in the area.

Community Festival Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how each council's allocation from the Community Festival Fund is determined.

(AQW 5070/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would refer the member to the answers provided to AQW 4147/11-15 and AQW 4532/11-15.

Community Festival Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what criteria are applied to individual applications for funding under the Community Festival Fund.

(AQW 5071/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department doesn't directly fund festivals. It has overall policy responsibility for the Community Festivals Fund but delivery of awards to individual festivals is devolved to local authorities.

Each Council is required to adhere to the overarching policy framework but within this each Council has the flexibility to develop its own application process and detailed criteria for funding.

For details of the criteria applied to individual applications you should contact the councils directly.

DCAL: Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the cost to her Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 5102/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the last two financial years, the Department incurred the following costs in respect of staff mileage claims:

2009-11	2009-10
£102,184	£113,666

Department of Education

DE: Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education to list all the current public contracts within his Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due to go out to tender.

(AQW 4254/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Department of Education has 31 current public contracts as detailed in the table attached.

Contract Awarded to	How Contract was advertised	Due to go out to Tender on
New Life Counselling	Contract arranged through Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) - Invitation To Tender (ITT)	August 2014
North Down Family Works	Contract arranged through CPD - ITT	August 2014
Counselling 4 Youth	Contract arranged through CPD - ITT	August 2014
Barnardos	Contract arranged through CPD - ITT	August 2013
Counselling 4 Youth	Contract arranged through CPD - ITT	August 2013
Pierce Communication	Contract arranged through CPD - By Invitation only	N/A
Robinson McIlwaine	Official Journal European Union	N/A
Turner and Townsend	Official Journal European Union	N/A
John McQuillan Contracts	Contract arranged through CPD	N/A
EMQC Ltd	Oral quotations in line with procurement control limits.	April 2013
DTZ McCombe Pierce	Office accommodation sourced late 2006 and leases renewed as and when required.	N/a
Capital Hartshead Ltd	Open competition	June 2016
Paragon Group (UK) Ltd	Single Tender Action	N/A
Pitney Bowes	Single Tender Action	N/A
Oasis Group	Contract set up by Properties Division - ITT	January 2013
Danwood	Contract arranged through CPD	April 2012
Canon	Single Tender Action	N/A
Sandhill	Single Tender Action	July 2012
IBM	Single Tender Action	December 2012
ESRI Ireland	Single Tender Action	October 2012
E-business Implementation Services	Single Tender Action	November 2012
Formic	Single Tender Action	October 2012
Bottomline Technology	Single Tender Action	March 2012
Sage	Single Tender Action	N/A
Cannon Hygiene	Contract arranged through CPD	Currently out to tender
Resource (Cleaning contract)	Contract arranged through CPD	Currently out to tender
Resource (Portering contract)	Contract arranged through CPD	Currently out to tender
Sodexo (Catering contract)	Contract arranged through CPD	Currently out to tender
All Water Systems	Single Tender Action	September 2014
The Early Years Organisation	Contract arranged through CPD - By Invitation Only	N/A
RMS McClure Watters	Contract arranged through CPD – ITT	N/A

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Education Orders

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education whether, under existing Education Orders, the Commission governing the South Eastern Education and Library Board can continue to operate indefinitely.

(AQW 4378/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The decision to appoint commissioners was taken in accordance with the Department's legislative powers in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986. The terms and conditions of their appointment advised that the period of appointment would be until such times as the Department terminates their appointment.

I have no plans to replace the commissioners at this time and reconstitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board. However, I will keep the position under review, taking account of the timescale for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education when the South Eastern Education and Library Board will be re-established.

(AQW 4414/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The decision to appoint commissioners was taken in accordance with the Department's legislative powers in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986. The terms and conditions of their appointment advised that the period of appointment would be until such times as the Department terminates their appointment.

I have no plans to replace the commissioners at this time and reconstitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board. However, I will keep the position under review, taking account of the timescale for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education how many children have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in each of the last four years.

(AQW 4587/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold information on the total number of children diagnosed with specific medical conditions. However, it does hold information collected via the annual school census on the number of pupils attending grant-aided schools here, who have been recorded by the school on the Register of Special Education Needs as having been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder. This information is presented in the table below.

Pupils at schools and in funded pre-school education with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder 2007/08 – 2010/11

Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Pupils with ADD/ADHD	2,190	2,284	2,353	2,477

Source: NI school census.

Note:

- Figures relate to pupils in funded places in voluntary and private pre-school centres, nursery schools, primary schools, post-primary schools and special schools.
- Figures relate to pupils recorded at Stage 1 – 5 of the Special Education Needs Code of Practice, recorded as ADD/ADHD.

Schools: School Dinner Provision

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education, in relation to schools which provide school dinners for other schools, to detail (i) how this arrangement is decided; and (ii) the rationale behind why a school with 30 pupils should provide school dinners for 3 other larger schools.

(AQW 4621/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The day-to-day operation of the school meals service is a matter for the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in the controlled and maintained sectors and individual voluntary grammar and grant maintained schools.

The ELBs assess the viability of school meals kitchens and dining centres using a number of factors which vary from Board to Board. They include the expected daily uptake of meals; kitchen capacity and location; equipment capability; availability of staff; availability of transport and the distance and time taken for food to be transported.

There are a number of reasons why a kitchen serving only 30 meals may transport to other schools. Many transporting schools have been doing so over a considerable number of years, some in predominately rural areas. The rationale for any decisions taken at that time would have included the factors detailed above. In addition, the following circumstances may now apply:

- The transporting school will have a large kitchen which was equipped in a time when the meal numbers were higher.
- The transporting kitchen will have a high structural standard so meeting the relevant health and safety legislation.
- Enrolment in the transporting school may have fallen over the years with the resultant drop in meals uptake.
- The associated dining centres may have no cooking facilities – they may have a servery only.
- The geographical nature of the area – the transporting kitchen may be equidistant from the associated dining centres so reducing transport costs.

DE: Capital Works Projects

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education (i) how much his Department spent on capital works projects; and (ii) of this, how much was paid to building contractors, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4657/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following tables set out the information requested:

(i)

	2008/09 (£000s)	2009/10 (£000s)	2010/11 (£000s)
Total Major Works Capital Expenditure	69,989	73,354	38,392
Total Minor Works Capital Expenditure	68,248	82,774	42,211
Total Capital Works Expenditure	138,237	156,128	80,603

(ii)

	2008/09 (£000s)	2009/10 (£000s)	2010/11 (£000s)
Major Works Building Contractors Cost	58,422	44,677	23,039

The total figure for Major and Minor Works Capital expenditure includes payments to contractors and consultants fees associated with each works. Information on minor capital works building contractor cost is not held separately and is not readily available.

Preschool Places

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education how many children in the South Antrim area aged (i) two; (ii) three; and (iii) four currently have a pre-school place.

(AQW 4699/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information on the number of children in DE funded pre-school places will not be available until the publication of the outcome of the annual School Census in mid – December 2011.

Grammar Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the correlation between children attending grammar schools and the affluence of the area in which they live.

(AQW 4760/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The correlation between the level of affluence of an area and the likelihood that children from that area will attend a grammar school suggests that there are several factors that may impact on the type of school a pupil attends.

There is a significant difference between the percentage of pupils attending grammar schools from the 10% most deprived wards compared to the percentage of pupils attending grammar schools from the 10% least deprived wards. Figures from the school census in 2010/11 showed 42.0% of post-primary pupils attended grammar schools. Of those pupils who lived in the 10% most deprived wards, 20.4% attended grammar schools. This compared to 68.9% of those pupils who lived in the 10% least deprived wards, as ranked in the local Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 report.

Admissions to grammar schools are based on tests. The families who can afford private tuition may secure an advantage in these tests over those who cannot afford it. I want to ensure that children are able to access all post-primary schools on the basis of equality. That is why my Department recommends that schools do not use unregulated entrance tests which from the figures above appear to favour the more affluent.

Schools: Bullying

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what further action his Department intends to take to address bullying in schools.

(AQW 4820/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Bullying, in whatever form and for whatever reason, has no place in schools. The Department recognises that it cannot tackle bullying alone and it is for this reason that it continues to fund and participate in the local Anti-bullying Forum (NIABF).

The Forum's Strategy which is published on its website (www.niabf.org.uk) sets out its programme of work for 2010-2013. Work is being progressed through a number of task groups established to examine specific types of bullying such as homophobic, disablist, transphobic and sectarian. The Education and Library Boards' Inter-Board Group supports this work.

Of specific mention is the development of a resource to support schools in the management of alleged bullying incidents. "Effective Responses to Bullying" takes schools on a staged journey to resolving a concern, offering levelled interventions for both the recipient of bullying and the pupils displaying bullying behaviour. This resource will be distributed to all schools in early 2012. Plans are also underway for Anti-Bullying Week 2012.

My Department has recently published a research report about "The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland" and is considering the recommendations in line with the Department's and the Forum's future work plans.

DE: Capital Small Grants Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what capital small grants schemes are available from his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, for a group to create a garden, at a residential home, for the benefit of people with disabilities.

(AQW 4830/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's powers to give capital grants relate to Schools and to voluntary organisations providing facilities for Youth Services. Neither DE nor its arms-length bodies operate capital grants schemes for the development of residential homes for disabled people.

Schools: Academic Selection

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education whether the schools which use academic selection tests have provided his Department with full details of who funds the tests.

(AQW 4832/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An attempt was made in 2010 to establish with schools how they were funding their independent entrance tests. Most schools were evasive on the question but some schools using a test for which parents were not charged were clear that they were not using their delegated budget to fund the entrance test. This begs the question of how these tests are being funded which only those involved can answer.

Asthma Policy

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education whether schools are required to have an asthma policy and regular asthma awareness training for staff.

(AQW 4838/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's guidance in relation to asthma is contained within the document "Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs", which was produced in co-operation with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and in consultation with a range of education and health bodies and professionals and the teachers' unions. The guidance was distributed to all schools and associated training provided for all principals in the nursery, primary, post-primary and special school sectors.

Each school's employing authority is responsible for ensuring that the school has a policy for supporting pupils with medication needs and managing medication.

There are many competing demands for the inclusion of training on specific topics such as asthma awareness. All Education and Library Boards (ELBs) therefore undertake, on an annual basis, a needs analysis of the training required by schools in the forthcoming academic year. School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of their teachers and they can avail of the wide range of courses on all aspects of special educational needs offered by ELBs.

Computer Programming

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has a strategy in place, or is developing a strategy, to make computer programming part of the curriculum.

(AQW 4885/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum has been designed to provide flexibility for schools to develop experiences which suit the needs of their pupils. Embedding mandatory cross-curricular skills and keeping prescribed content to a minimum, allows schools to choose the most appropriate approach to take with their pupils to ensure they are engaged and challenged to reach their full potential.

Using ICT is one of the cross-curricular skills. It offers a range of ICT opportunities, developing skills which young people can apply in practical, everyday situations. Progression in these skills is set out in Levels of Progression which will be statutory from 2013/14.

Guidance has been provided to support assessment of Using ICT. This includes activities such as 'Exploring Programming' and 'Game Making'.

At this time there are no plans to make computer programming mandatory in the revised curriculum. However, should schools feel it meets the needs of their pupils, there is sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to allow them to teach it.

Loreto Grammar School, Omagh

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the court judgement in relation to Loreto Grammar School, Omagh. (AQW 4939/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The judgment in this case is currently under appeal by my Department, with the hearing in the Court of Appeal scheduled to resume on the 12 and 13 December. It is not known at this stage when the outcome will be announced.

Helping Hands Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Helping Hands Programme. (AQW 4940/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department, as a member of the Regional Strategy Group on Domestic Violence, works with Women's Aid Federation and other statutory and voluntary sector organisations to implement the "Tackling Violence at Home" strategy and related action plan.

As part of the implementation plan the Department agreed to match fund the contribution of Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, some £180k over a 3 year period, to support the work of the Women's Aid Federation in tackling domestic abuse.

The funding from the Department has been used to update the "Helping Hands" materials pack for pupils and to develop a training course for teachers to equip them to deliver the programme for their pupils. This approach addressed an identified need for teachers to have access to professional development which could contribute to increasing protection for children. The 2 day training course is for Key Stage 2 teachers and is intended to increase their confidence, and capability to teach about sensitive topics and to respond appropriately to issues and concerns raised by pupils.

The training provides teachers with the skills and confidence to deliver the "Helping Hands" Programme to their pupils, in place of Women's Aid volunteers. Training the teachers will ensure sustainability for the "Helping Hands" Programme in schools in future years. The current plans are that some 300 teachers will be trained by the end of March 2012.

Sport: Hockey

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what assistance is provided to schools for the promotion and development of hockey through the Sports Teaching Programme. (AQW 4984/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Curriculum Sports Programme is delivered on behalf of the Department of Education by the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association. The programme does not focus specifically on the skills associated with either football or Gaelic games but rather aims to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils through participation in enjoyable sports activities. The Department of Education has made £1.5 million available for the Curriculum Sports Programme in the current financial year and the programme is currently being delivered by 61 coaches to over 36,000 primary school children in 563 schools. I have no plans to introduce coaches from a hockey, cricket or any other sport background.

Sport: Cricket

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what assistance is provided to schools for the promotion and development of cricket through the Sports Teaching Programme. (AQW 4985/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Curriculum Sports Programme is delivered on behalf of the Department of Education by the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association. The programme does not focus specifically on the skills associated with either football or Gaelic games but rather aims to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils through participation in enjoyable sports activities. The Department of Education has made £1.5 million available for the Curriculum Sports Programme in the current financial year and the programme is currently being delivered by 61 coaches to over 36,000 primary school children in 563 schools. I have no plans to introduce coaches from a hockey, cricket or any other sport background.

Sure Start

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to extend the provision of Sure Start to isolated areas of social disadvantage and need that are located within more affluent Super Output Areas. (AQW 5120/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently 34 Sure Start Programmes across the north of Ireland offering services to an estimated 34,000 children age 0-4 and their parents. Current policy is that Sure Start services are targeted to at least the top 20% most disadvantaged wards in the north of Ireland (as defined by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measures 2005).

Over the past 3 years it has been possible to include the top 20% Super Output Areas, linked to outreach from existing Sure Starts. This is in recognition that there are many disadvantaged children and their families living outside of the designated ward areas covered by Sure Start. Super Output Area (SOA) geography contains an average of 2,000 people. The NI MDM analysis produced by NISRA is a relative measure of deprivation in small areas across Northern Ireland. It is the official measure of deprivation and is used widely across government to target need.

The draft Early Years 0-6 Strategy contained a commitment to seek to expand the reach of Sure Start and work has commenced on identifying the ward areas now falling within the top 25% most disadvantaged areas. The introduction of this and, indeed, the further extension of Sure Start will depend on the availability of additional resources.

Learning for Life and Work

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education what his Department's practices are in relation to the employability strand of Learning for Life and Work, which is delivered to provide students with the necessary skills in preparation for entry into the workforce.

(AQO 912/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Employability is a key theme underpinning the revised curriculum which aims to prepare all our young people for all aspects of life and work and to enable them to develop as confident and articulate individuals, able to play their full part in society and our economy. The area of Personal Development & Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post-primary will enable all young people to prepare for and engage in career planning from primary school onwards.

At post-primary, the Employability strand of LLW consists of Work in the Local and Global Economy, Career Management and Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. Pupils will continue to reflect on their own skills and areas for self-development and explore the changing concept of 'career' and various types of jobs, including in the local area, as well as exploring enterprise and entrepreneurship which provides opportunities for our young people to investigate the need for creativity and enterprise, whether as an employer or employee, and to identify and practise some of the skills and develop the attributes associated with being enterprising.

Schools receive delegated budgets to enable them to deliver all aspects of the curriculum, including the PDMU and LLW areas of learning. Additional funding has also been set aside for programmes designed to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship and to introduce young people to the world of work. The Department provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise, employability and innovation events and programmes either in school or at larger regional events, for both primary and post-primary pupils. These organisations include Young Enterprise, Sentinus, School Employer Connections, Charter Work Experience and a number of Business Education Partnerships. Such events help to create an enterprise culture within the classroom and to develop in our young people more innovative and enterprising skills and attitudes, not just to set up businesses but also to build their own careers and to stay employable

Schools: Chairpersons of Boards of Governors

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, in light of the most recent correspondence to the Chairpersons of Boards of Governors, what other areas he has identified for savings within the education budget to deliver additional funding for schools.

(AQW 5184/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am continuing to explore the scope for further savings to supplement the additional £40m that I announced on 17 November to go directly into schools. In this context I have asked officials to carry out a review right across the education budget with the primary focus being on delivering additional funding for the classroom. I have also met with the Finance Minister and discussed in detail the impact of the Education Budget as it currently stands. In addition, I am looking towards the Executive's Budget Review Group, which is seeking to identify further sources of funding, in order to reduce the financial impact on schools.

Department for Employment and Learning

Subjects Directly Linked to the Creative Industries

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people (i) enrolled; and (ii) graduated in subjects directly linked to the creative industries in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4446/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The number of student enrolments and qualifiers, in Creative Arts and Design, Mass Communications and documentations, Architecture and Software engineering subjects, at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in each of the last 5 years, is detailed in the table below:

Academic year	Enrolments	Qualifiers
2005/06	3,945	1,125
2006/07	3,795	1,145
2007/08	3,625	1,025
2008/09	3,880	1,095
2009/10	4,190	1,120

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- HESA data are rounded to the nearest 5.
- The 'Creative Arts and Design, Mass Communications and documentations, Architecture and Software engineering' subject areas from the HESA record have been used as a proxy for subjects directly linked to the creative industries.
- It should be noted that the above information on qualifiers relates to students who gain qualifications at all levels of study ie both undergraduate (both first degree and other undergraduate) and postgraduate. Qualifiers have been used as a proxy for graduates.
- Enrolment figures include students in their first and continuing years of study also across all levels. Only a proportion of these students will be in their final year and therefore expected to qualify in any given year.

Higher Education: Business and Finance Graduates

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people (i) enrolled; and (ii) graduated in business and finance related subjects in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4447/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of student enrolments and qualifiers, in business studies, management studies, finance, accounting, marketing, human resource management, and office skills, at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in each of the last 5 years, is detailed in the table below:

Academic year	Enrolments	Qualifiers
2005/06	7,260	2,325
2006/07	6,640	1,735
2007/08	6,605	2,010
2008/09	6,670	2,220
2009/10	7,590	2,310

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

- HESA data are rounded to the nearest 5.
- Subjects included in business studies, management studies, finance, accounting, marketing, human resource management, and office skills from the HESA record have been used as a proxy for business and finance related subjects.
- It should be noted that the above information on qualifiers relates to students who gain qualifications at all levels of study ie both undergraduate (both first degree and other undergraduate) and postgraduate. Qualifiers have been used as a proxy for graduates.
- Enrolment figures include students in their first and continuing years of study also across all levels. Only a proportion of these students will be in their final year and therefore expected to qualify in any given year.

Higher Education: ICT

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people (i) enrolled; and (ii) graduated in Information and Communication Technology or computer related subjects in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4448/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of student enrolments and qualifiers, in Computer Science, at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in each of the last 5 years, is detailed in the table below:

Academic year	Enrolments	Qualifiers
2005/06	3,225	895
2006/07	2,825	680
2007/08	2,630	630

Academic year	Enrolments	Qualifiers
2008/09	2,415	585
2009/10	2,675	590

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

- HESA data are rounded to the nearest 5.
- The Computer Science subject area from the HESA record has been used as a proxy for Information and Communication Technology or computer related subjects.
- It should be noted that the above information on qualifiers relates to students who gain qualifications at all levels of study ie both undergraduate (both first degree and other undergraduate) and postgraduate. Qualifiers have been used as a proxy for graduates.
- Enrolment figures include students in their first and continuing years of study also across all levels. Only a proportion of these students will be in their final year and therefore expected to qualify in any given year.

Higher Education: Construction

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people (i) enrolled; and (ii) graduated in construction related subjects in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4449/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of student enrolments and qualifiers, in 'Architecture, Building and Planning', 'Civil Engineering' and 'Structural Engineering', subjects, at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in each of the last 5 years, is detailed in the table below:

Academic year	Enrolments	Qualifiers
2005/06	2,885	615
2006/07	2,920	785
2007/08	2,985	735
2008/09	3,235	875
2009/10	3,270	875

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

- HESA data are rounded to the nearest 5.
- The 'Architecture, Building and Planning', 'Civil Engineering' and 'Structural Engineering' subject areas from the HESA record have been used as a proxy for construction related subjects.
- It should be noted that the above information on qualifiers relates to students who gain qualifications at all levels of study ie both undergraduate (both first degree and other undergraduate) and postgraduate. Qualifiers have been used as a proxy for graduates.
- Enrolment figures include students in their first and continuing years of study also across all levels. Only a proportion of these students will be in their final year and therefore expected to qualify in any given year.

Sentinus Project

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what involvement his Department has with the Sentinus project in schools, including the issue of any policy directive associated with the project.

(AQW 4536/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has not provided any funding directly to Sentinus and has had no involvement in their projects in schools.

St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students enrolled in (i) St Mary's University College, Belfast; and (ii) Stranmillis University College, Belfast at (a) 1 October 1990; (b) 1 October 2000; (c) 1 October 2010; and (d) 1 October 2011.

(AQW 4610/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of students enrolled at St Mary's University College, Belfast and Stranmillis University College, Belfast in, 1990/91, 2000/01 and 2009/10 (latest available year) is detailed in the table below:

Academic year	St Mary's University College, Belfast	Stranmillis University College, Belfast
1990/91	691	695
2000/01	970	1,220
2009/10	1,000	1,250

Sources:

- 1 **1990/91 data** - Stranmillis University College, Belfast and St Mary's University College, Belfast
- 2 **2000/01 and 2009/10 data** - Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- 1 Enrolments in 1990/91 related only to teaching courses. Non-teaching courses were introduced after this and are therefore included in the subsequent years.
- 2 HESA data are rounded to the nearest 5.
- 3 The latest available data are for academic year 2009/10.

St Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail what collaboration currently exists between St Mary's University College, Belfast, Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 4614/11-15)

Dr Farry: Whilst operating as autonomous institutions, St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College are, academically, fully integrated into Queen's University Belfast. They operate as Schools of the University within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Students of Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges are also students of Queen's and are issued with Queen's University student cards. These student cards enable them to use University facilities, such as libraries, the Students' Union and sporting facilities, in the same way as any other Queen's student. Also, upon graduation, students of Stranmillis and St Mary's are awarded degrees by Queen's University.

The Principals of Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College are members of Queen's University's Academic Council and both institutions are also represented on the University's Education Committee.

Queen's University has stated that the University shares a considerable amount of academic support advice with the two University Colleges, most notably from the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs, particularly in relation to quality assurance, regulations review, programme review and the graduation process. Furthermore, Queen's senior management holds regular formal and informal meetings with the College Principals and both Colleges send representatives to the meetings of the Directors of Education, within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

The University has also said that a small number of staff from both Colleges contribute to Masters teaching at Queen's University and share in the supervision of Queen's Doctoral students. Also, formal research collaboration exists between Queen's, St Mary's and Stranmillis, with staff from all institutions working together on proposing and conducting research projects. The large-scale survey of teachers carried out for the General Teaching Council is a recent example of such research collaboration.

I trust you find this helpful.

DEL: Sports

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the funding his Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4641/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning has not provided any funding for the development and promotion of these sports.

St Mary's College, Belfast

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why St Mary's College, Belfast will not be included in the merger of Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

(AQW 4654/11-15)

Dr Farry: The decision to seek a merger with Queen's University Belfast was one taken by the governing body of Stranmillis University College. Both the College and the University are autonomous bodies and are responsible for determining their own future strategic direction. St. Mary's University College which is also an autonomous body, did not take such a decision. At the time that the merger was first suggested, St. Mary's made it known that it was not interested in merging with any other institution. Its governing body wished to maintain its independence. Both Stranmillis and St. Mary's are, however, colleges of Queen's University and are fully academically integrated with it.

Economic Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the target set out in the Economic Strategy to move 114,000 benefit claimants into employment by March 2015; (i) the rationale behind this figure; (ii) what jobs they can obtain, given that the Economic Strategy proposes to promote only 25,000 jobs; and (iii) whether moving these people into employment, given the lack of available jobs in the economy, will inevitably displace others from their jobs.

(AQW 4710/11-15)

Dr Farry: The target to move 114,000 benefit claimants into work by March 2015 reflects the Employment Service's efforts to assist benefit age clients into employment. The commitment was adopted following the application of a statistical model to trends in off-flows to work from JSA and other benefits. This work provided a robust foundation which informed the adoption of the target. The same approach was applied in the previous Programme for Government which set a target of 70,000 for the period 2008-11. That target was well exceeded, with over 90,000 assisted into employment in that period.

The "into employment" target should not be confused with the commitment to create 25,000 new jobs. It is likely that some of the 114,000 will move into some of the 25,000 new jobs but most will fill vacancies advertised by employers through the Employment Service and through other services such as newspapers and private employment agencies.

The purpose of the statutory Employment Service is to help those disadvantaged in the labour market to compete on a more equal basis for the jobs available. No one will lose their job as a consequence of the Employment Service's intervention. More people will simply be competing for the jobs that are available. By preparing benefit claimants for work, the Employment Service will ensure that they do not become detached from the labour market and slip into long-term benefit dependency.

Dedicated Veterinary College

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he intends to establish a dedicated veterinary college, or make a veterinary degree accessible at universities here, given that prospective students have to leave the jurisdiction to study.

(AQW 4727/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has no plans to establish a dedicated veterinary college in Northern Ireland, or develop a veterinary degree course. Northern Ireland's Higher Education Institutions are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including course provision.

The availability, and other trends, within the veterinary profession are regularly surveyed by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The most recent survey does not indicate any impending shortfall in the number of veterinary surgeons, nor has the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development identified any such difficulties within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, research undertaken by my Department in 2009, on forecasting future skills needs in Northern Ireland, shows that the supply of veterinary science graduates is projected to meet the indicative graduate requirement up to 2020.

I recently met with the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister, Ms Michelle O'Neill MLA, and we agreed on this position.

My Department will continue to provide financial support for eligible students from Northern Ireland who commence all undergraduate degree courses (including veterinary science) in Great Britain in academic year 2012/13.

DEL: Assembly Questions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4736/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and so the information requested is not available.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much capital funding has been allocated to Stranmillis University College, Belfast in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4768/11-15)

Dr Farry: The amount of capital funding allocated to Stranmillis University College by the Department in each of the last five financial years is shown in the table below:

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
£4,765,479	£4,129,609	£444,448	£145,000	£605,519	£10,090,055

Employment: Working Age Benefit Claimants

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following the Economic Strategy statement on 17 November 2011 which stated that the Executive 'will move 114,000 working-age benefit clients into employment by March 2015, what benefits these 114,000 people are claiming; and where his Department intends to find employment for these people.

(AQW 5285/11-15)

Dr Farry: The target to move 114,000 benefit claimants into work by March 2015 reflects the Employment Service's efforts to assist benefit age clients into employment. The target is based on robust statistical analysis and modelling of trends in off-flows to work from benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance. We expect 106,000 JSA claimants to move into work with the balance of 8,000 made up of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) claimants. The same approach was applied in the previous Programme for Government which set a target of 70,000 for the period 2008-11. That target was well exceeded, with over 90,000 assisted into employment in that period.

The "into employment" target should not be confused with the commitment to create 25,000 new jobs. It is likely that a number of the 114,000 will move into some of the 25,000 new jobs, but the majority is likely to fill vacancies advertised by employers through the Employment Service and through other services such as newspapers and private employment agencies. It therefore mainly represents normal labour market turnover.

The purpose of the statutory Employment Service is to help those disadvantaged in the labour market to compete on a more equal basis for the jobs available. No one will lose their job as a consequence of the Employment Service's intervention. More people will simply be competing for the jobs that are available. By preparing benefit claimants for work, the Employment Service will ensure that they do not become detached from the labour market and slip into long-term benefit dependency.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Industrial Development Act 1982

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact, should Northern Ireland lose its automatic assisted area status under the proposed changes to the Industrial Development Act 1982.

(AQW 4466/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Independent Review of Economic Policy recognised the importance of regional aid as a policy lever to grow the economy. It has made a positive impact in attracting new foreign direct investment, as well as encouraging indigenous and FDI companies to expand and/or re-invest.

I believe the proposed change to the Industrial Development Act fails to recognise our long standing economic challenges, as well as the ongoing impact of the global downturn. The proposal is also untimely given the UK Government's commitment to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy.

I and my Executive colleagues have responded to the consultation on Revisions to the Industrial Development Act, highlighting the need for Northern Ireland to retain automatic assisted area status. We have also identified this as an important priority in the recently launched draft economic strategy.

Tourism

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the annual tourist spend in each district council area for the last available year; and for the estimated spend in each district council area in each year up to 2020.

(AQW 4473/11-15)

Mrs Foster: 2009 is the last available year for estimates of annual tourist spend in each district council area and figures are as follows:

2009	SPEND (£ Million)
Antrim	25.6
Ards	8.3
Armagh	8.8
Ballymena	13.4
Ballymoney	2.6
Banbridge	4.6
Belfast	128.2
Carrickfergus	9.1
Castlereagh	1.7
Coleraine	59.4

2009	SPEND (£ Million)
Cookstown	4.3
Craigavon	8.6
Londonderry	28.9
2009	SPEND (£ Million)
Down	40.2
Dungannon	7.4
Fermanagh	32.2
Larne	11.6
Limavady	9.8
Lisburn	13.1
Magherafelt	4.1
Moyle	27.0
Newry & Mourne	12.7
Newtownabbey	8.6
North Down	19.2
Omagh	13.5
Strabane	4.2
Total NI	507.0

- These figures have been produced by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and, as they are survey based, come with certain caveats. Details can be found by accessing the attached link below.
<http://www.nitb.com/DocumentPage.aspx?path=2e3c2831-b6cb-4bcd-a276-e0283e5bd203,b5d4e565-ef7a-4afe-b31e-ffff177e70cb,7990e2ce-9eca-4f91-a891-edc6e07db308>
- Estimates for spend in each district council area from 2010 to 2020 are not available. Tourism targets for visitor numbers and expenditure outlined in the Draft Programme for Government 2011-15, and the Draft Tourism Strategy to 2020 are based on the total Northern Ireland figure.

University of Ulster: Centre of Excellence

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what has been the outcome and effect of the InvestNI funding for the 'Centre of Excellence in Intelligent Systems project at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster, as measured against the vision and strategic aims set out in the relevant Business Plan.

(AQW 4552/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI funding for the Centre of Excellence in Intelligent Systems project at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster has created a high class research facility. Its research power has been ranked as 15th out of the 81 Computer Science schools in the UK. The Centre which employs 75 staff and 38 PhD students has been successful in securing research funding in excess of £3.8m from a range of sources including national (EPSRC) and international (eg European Union). Commercial Income of £949k has also been secured.

The outcomes achieved for the first 5 years of operation are summarised below:

	Expected 2011	Achieved 2011
Staff Numbers	49	75
PhD students	33	38
Grant income	£1.5m	£3.8m
Commercial income	£500k	£949k
Published papers	35	>200

University of Ulster: Centre of Excellence

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much funding InvestNI contributed to the 'Centre of Excellence in Intelligent Systems (CoEIS)' project at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster; (ii) when each tranche of the funding was paid; (iii) whether the strategic objective of recruiting two Professors, two Readers and further research staff was met and, if not, why not; (iv) what academic posts are currently funded and filled by this funding; and (iv) how else the funding has been spent.

(AQW 4555/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The project had a total budget of £20 million, with investment of £7.2 million from Invest NI.
- (ii) Each tranche of the funding was paid on a vouched and approved basis as follows:

Payment	Date	Amount (£)
1	Jul-07	409,778
2	Dec-07	340,373.14
3	Apr-08	359,297.98
4	Jul-08	564,616.36
5	Jan-09	707,916.97
6	Oct-09	573,048.32
7	Nov-09	1,707,387.90
8	Mar-10	568,291.59
9	Jul-10	579,533.38
10	Feb-11	419,926.15
11	Aug-11	212,857.31
Total		6,443,027

- (iii) The project milestone of appointing 2 internationally recognised research professors and associated readers was not fully achieved. The following appointments were made:
- Professor of Cognitive Robotics
 - Reader in Wireless Technologies
 - Reader in Robotics

Although the Centre had aimed to appoint 2 professors they were unable to find the high calibre researchers who were willing to leave their current positions to fill the post. The Centre has however taken advantage of visiting professorship programme at the University of Ulster and has a Professor in Computational Neuroscience Research available to the team. The team are also currently recruiting for professor in cognitive robotics due the unfortunate death of the existing professor.

In addition to the academic staff funded by Invest NI, the centre currently employs two professors and three readers who are funded by the university.

All the other research staff in the original business plan have been appointed.

- (iv) What academic posts are currently funded and filled by this funding

The funding will cover one academic post of a Reader until the 30th November 2011 following which all academic posts will be covered by the University of Ulster.

- (v) How else the funding has been spent.

The funding also covered costs relating to recruitment, equipment, refurbishment, consumables, research student support and travel.

Invest NI: Evaluation Services

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how InvestNI's current call to tender for the provision of evaluation services is conducive to its role in supporting new and small businesses.

(AQW 4556/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The purpose of evaluation is to assess how Invest NI's programmes are performing and contributing to the Northern Ireland Programme for Government. Whilst evaluation activity does not directly support new and small businesses, the evidence provided enables Invest NI to refine the targeting of its resources in line with the development needs of Northern Ireland businesses and the economy as a whole.

The aim of the current call to tender for the provision of evaluation services to Invest NI is to achieve efficiencies in procurement and obtain better value for money. In particular, savings in staff time, greater consistency and quality of deliverables and economies of scale in the consultancy fees are all expected benefits.

For the budget period 2011/12 to 2014/15 the Executive has agreed a target of year on year reductions of 10% for external consultancy spend. The implementation of the call to tender for the provision of evaluation services is in line with this decision.

Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQO 684/11-15, for her assessment of whether the current consultation on the proposed changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation will impact on new wind turbines of up to 250kW to claim four Renewable Obligation Certificates for every 1000kWh of electricity generated,
(AQW 4559/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The ongoing consultation on changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation from 1 April 2013 does not propose a change to the current four Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) for every megawatt hour of electricity generated by an onshore wind turbine with a maximum total installed capacity of 250 kilowatts.

Whilst the consultation covers ROC banding levels for the period 2013 to 2017 it also indicates that ROC levels may be reviewed again during that time period in the wider context of the Coalition Government's Electricity Market Reform initiative and any significant changes to technology costs. This would be subject to consultation. However, a generating station accredited at four ROCs is 'grandfathered' at that level for the 20 years accreditation period.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to the fact that chemicals which are left in the ground as a result of hydraulic fracturing, would exclude the future use of the contaminated layer of earth.
(AQW 4615/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The use of chemical additives in hydraulic fracturing fluids would be considered as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment associated with a planning application for permission to carry out drilling and hydraulic fracturing for shale gas.

Sports: Development and Promotion

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the funding her Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.
(AQW 4642/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recently established NI charity 'Happy Children' has secured an exciting opportunity to market and sell the official Liverpool FC 'International Football Academy Soccer Schools'. This agreement has been secured on an 'exclusive franchise' deal, initially for 3 years covering both NI and ROI.

The group recently completed the Invest NI Social Entrepreneurship Programme and received a grant of £8,000. Having demonstrated growth potential Happy Children have been taken on as a mainstream Invest NI client and are currently in negotiation for additional support towards a business development manager and marketing activities in the ROI.

The business will create 5 full time jobs and £300k in revenue over the next 2 years.

NITB's Tourism Events Funding Programme provides support to Events. Financial assistance is channelled towards the costs of hosting the event.

	2010 – 2011	2011 – 2012	Total
(i) Rugby	NIL	NIL	NIL
(ii) Football	£80,000	£80,000	£160,000
(iii) Gaelic games	NIL	NIL	NIL
(iv) Motor sports	£217,217	£158,000	£375,217
Total	£297,217	£238,000	£535,217

Flights from Belfast International Airport

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what her Department is doing to promote and re-establish flights from Belfast International Airport to (i) Canada; (ii) the USA; and (iii) northern European countries.
(AQW 4649/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is seeking to build on the reduction in the rate of Air Passenger Duty (APD) applied to direct long haul flights operating in Band B. This has sent a very positive message to airlines (especially those with the potential to provide links with the USA and Canada) that Northern Ireland is a viable option for long haul business. The draft Programme for Government has reinforced this message by setting an objective to eliminate the duty applied to direct long haul flights once APD is devolved.

To maximise the opportunities presented by the reduction in APD, I have asked Tourism Ireland to work with Northern Ireland's airports to identify potential new carriers and routes, both long haul and short haul, into Northern Ireland.

Home Insulation Products

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why domestic energy suppliers do not subsidise home insulation products sold in hardware retailers, similar to the scheme in Britain, under the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target Scheme.

(AQW 4714/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target scheme was not introduced in Northern Ireland because the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation already had the Energy Efficiency Levy in place, the forerunner to the current Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP).

NISEP is funded through the Public Service Obligation, a levy per kWh applied to all electricity supplied in Northern Ireland. Energy suppliers and other contractors can bid for levy funds to finance domestic energy efficiency projects. NISEP is open to bids involving such retailer offers; but, in order to ensure that real energy savings are achieved within NI, there are strict rules governing their acceptability. For the past number of years none of the organisations eligible to bid for NISEP funding have brought forward retailer offers.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Loan Fund

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with the banks in relation to the small and medium enterprises loan fund, set out in the Economic Strategy, to aid liquidity and to ensure that finance is available to help growth.

(AQW 4718/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Access to finance is recognised as a key issue which cuts across a number of areas in the draft Economic Strategy. DETI, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which supports the availability of capital within the local SME market. An important element of the strategy is the establishment of a £50m Growth Loan Fund which will help viable small and medium sized businesses in the manufacturing and tradable services sectors with growth ambitions.

The primary purpose of the loan fund is to provide additional funding to SMEs to enable them to achieve their growth objectives. It will address a gap in the market for access to finance by complementing existing sources of finance, including bank finance, venture capital and private equity finance.

Invest NI commissioned ASM Horwath to carry out an economic appraisal to determine the preferred option for implementing the Growth Loan Fund, and to assess value for money. Invest NI has had regular contact with the banks in relation to this fund, both before the appraisal was conducted and following approval of the fund. ASM Horwath also consulted with the banks during the appraisal process.

Tourism: Number of Tourists

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of tourists in each of the last four years; and (ii) the revenue generated by these tourists in each year; and from where this information is sourced.

(AQW 4793/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The estimated number of visitors, domestic tourists from within Northern Ireland and revenue generated for each of the last four years are detailed below.

	Out of state		Domestic	
	Out of state visits (million)	Revenue (£million)	Domestic visits (million)	Revenue (£million)
2010 *	1.77	336	1.39	208
2009	1.92	337	1.38	192
2008	2.08	396	1.02	144
2007	2.11	376	1.15	159

* Final data for Republic of Ireland visitors to NI in 2010 are not yet available. The overall figure includes an estimate of Republic of Ireland visitors in 2010, provided by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

The visitor and revenue estimates are sourced from the following surveys:

GB and overseas visitors to NI are sourced from the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (Northern Ireland Tourist Board 2007-2009, Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency 2010), Country of Residence Survey (Central Statistics Office Ireland) and the Survey of Overseas Travellers (Fáilte Ireland).

Republic of Ireland visitors to NI are sourced from the Household Travel Survey (Central Statistics Office Ireland).

NI domestic tourists are sourced from the UK Travel Survey (TNS – Research International)

Renewable Energy: Electricity Consumption

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of electricity consumption from renewable sources in each of the last four years.

(AQW 4794/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The total amount of electricity consumption from renewable sources over the last four full financial years is provided in the table below.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Electricity generated from renewables (MWh)	440937	596584	754866	745461
Renewable electricity as a percentage of total electricity distributed	5.0%	7.3%	9.3%	8.9%

The lower percentage figure for 2010/11 can be attributed to lower than average wind speeds over a number of months in that year. The figures to date for the period April-October 2011 are 543144 MWh and 12.2%.

Energy: Cost-saving Tariffs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether his Department intends to hold discussions with energy providers in relation to helping vulnerable customers transfer to the most cost-saving tariffs.

(AQW 4819/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I meet on a regular basis with energy providers to discuss a range of energy issues, including energy tariffs and vulnerable customers.

There are already a number of payment methods and sources of information and advice to customers to help them save money on energy costs. Domestic customers can avail of pre-payment electricity and gas meters to help with budgeting for their energy costs and customers can enter into direct debit arrangements which offer discounts over standard tariffs.

Furthermore, in March 2011, my Department made Regulations to transpose the EU Third Package of Energy legislation. One of the key objectives of the Third Package is to ensure a high level of consumer protection and the implementing regulations contain a range of measures to strengthen the Northern Ireland arrangements in this regard, particularly for vulnerable consumers. This includes addressing issues around customer switching, billing and provision of information to customers with the aim of ensuring energy companies are obliged to act in a way that promotes customer protection.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Loan Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the loans scheme for small and medium sized enterprises outlined in the draft Programme for Government, (i) will individual loans be impacted by the de minimis rules of the EU; (ii) will the ceiling of 200,000 euros over three fiscal years apply; and (iii) for her assessment of how EU restraints may inhibit the use of the loan scheme.

(AQW 4825/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- 1 Individual loans will not be impacted by de minimis rules of the EU.
- 2 The ceiling of 200,000 euros over three fiscal years will not apply.
- 3 EU restraints will have a minimal impact on the use of the loan scheme. State aid rules prevents loans being made to the following sectors:
 - Coal
 - Steel
 - Shipbuilding
 - Synthetic fibres
- 4 There is also a general rule under the EU Risk Capital guidelines that loans cannot be made to firms in difficulty. Separate rules are applicable for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty.

Credit Unions

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with Credit Unions regarding their potential role in driving economic recovery.

(AQW 4845/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have met with representatives of the Irish League of Credit Unions and also the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions to discuss a range of issues relevant to the role of the Credit Union movement in Northern Ireland. The Credit Union movement makes a valuable contribution to the social economy of Northern Ireland, and its sustained level of lending during the economic downturn has had a positive impact on the local communities it serves.

Credit Unions

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to use Credit Unions to stimulate economic growth.

(AQW 4846/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not have the powers to deploy credit unions as an instrument of its economic strategy. Credit unions operate on a cooperative basis and members entrust elected boards of directors to safeguard and prudentially use their savings for mutual benefit. In fulfilling their mandated role as a provider of affordable credit to, in many cases, those who might be financially excluded, credit unions are an important contributor to local economic activity. In facilitating a sustained level of lending during the economic downturn, the Credit Union movement has and continues to make a positive impact on the local communities served.

Employment: Portavogie Job Losses

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been lost in Portavogie in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4854/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Data is not available on jobs lost within the town of Portavogie. However, information is available at a District Council Level for redundancies and at Ward Level for claimant count.

Table 1 indicates that DETI were notified of 251 confirmed redundancies, within the Ards Council Area, since the start of 2007. For Northern Ireland, 12,776 were notified over the same period. However, firms are only legally required to notify Government of impending redundancies of 20 employees or more. Therefore these figures are likely to underestimate total job losses.

Table 1. Statistics on Confirmed Redundancies

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Ards DC	163	16	28	8	36
Northern Ireland	1,912	2,782	4,596	2,096	1,390

Note: * Data for January to October 2011.

Table 2 sets out data on the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits in the Portavogie Ward, in Ards District Council and in Northern Ireland.

Table 2. Claimant Count Data for Portavogie Ward, Ards DC and Northern Ireland

	Portavogie Ward		Ards DC		Northern Ireland	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
October 2007	33	1.1	758	1.5	22,902	2.0
October 2008	46	1.5	1,022	2.0	30,379	2.7
October 2009	71	2.4	1,655	3.3	52,734	4.6
October 2010	113	3.8	1,862	3.7	57,503	5.0
October 2011	113	3.8	2,011	4.0	59,973	5.2

Notes: Rates for wards in NI for 2007 onwards are calculated using the mid-2006 resident population aged 16-64.

Rates for local authorities from 2011 onwards are calculated using the mid-2010 resident population aged 16-64.

Rates for NI, from 2011 onwards, are calculated using the mid-2010 resident population aged 16-64.

You should note that, while there are obvious links, changes in the claimant count are not necessarily equivalent to job losses or creation as people may flow onto or off the register for a variety of reasons other than gaining or losing a job. For example, school leavers can add to the list while people reaching retirement age can come off the list.

Employment: Portavogie Job Creation

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created in Portavogie in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4856/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The data is not available to provide jobs created in Portavogie. However, the Invest NI jobs promoted in the Ards District Council Area are provided below.

Invest NI Jobs promoted, safeguarded and supported in Ards DCA

(1st April 2007 to 30th September 2011)

	Jobs promoted & Safeguarded	Jobs Supported by Enterprise Development Programme (EDP)
2007-08	11	55
2008-09	65	43
2009-10	168	23
2010-11	33	58
2011-12	54	38
Total	331	218

Notes: Jobs promoted and safeguarded includes jobs expected to be created by supported projects and jobs which would have been lost if projects had not been supported.

- The Enterprise Development Programme (formerly the Start A Business Programme) is delivered in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland and provides guidance to new businesses, reliant on the local Northern Ireland market.
- EDP jobs figures are based on an estimate of jobs created by an individual EDP offer. This estimation process is derived from an independent evaluation of the programme. In terms of promoting jobs, Invest NI supported the development of 331 jobs, in the Ards DCA between 1 April 2007 and 30 September 2011, 54 of which will be progressed in the next financial year. In addition, over the same period, Invest NI also supported 218 new, locally-owned, jobs indirectly through its Enterprise Development Programme. However, jobs will have been created, in this area, which have not received support from Invest NI.

Some data is available on employee jobs at a ward level within the Census of Employment, and at a District Council level in the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES). However, it is not consistent over the last five years, due to methodological changes, and is not particularly timely with the latest Census information being for 2009. Nevertheless the information can be still be accessed from the DETI website:

BRES <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-census-of-employment-2.htm>

Census <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-census-of-employment.htm>

Gas Exploration in County Fermanagh: Tamboran

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the role that she played in making the decision to award Tamboran the rights to explore for, and extract, gas in County Fermanagh.
(AQW 4894/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I had no involvement in the decisions to grant petroleum licences to individual companies, including that awarded to Tamboran Resources PTY Ltd. The granting of Petroleum Licences is governed by a legislative process set out in regulations and the decisions on all the petroleum licences issued in 2011 were determined by a panel consisting of officials from my Department, the British Geological Survey and the Whitehall Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Loan Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the interest to be charged on the loans scheme for small and medium sized enterprises, proposed in the draft Programme for Government, will be calculated.
(AQW 4905/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- 1 The loan fund will be managed on a commercial basis by an externally appointed fund manager.
- 2 The terms of each loan will be negotiated on an individual basis by the fund manager, taking account of relevant factors, including risk.
- 3 As loans will be primarily provided on an unsecured basis and other sources of funding will have been exhausted, the risk of default will be higher than on a secured bank debt portfolio. The fund manager will assess the risk involved in each case and will negotiate terms taking account of the risk level. The level of risk involved will necessitate an interest rate in excess of that charged by a bank on a lower risk secured debt.

Health and Safety Executive: Undeveloped Sites

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the powers of the Health and Safety Executive in relation to making undeveloped sites secure.
(AQW 4947/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland has no powers to make undeveloped sites secure, if no construction or building work is taking place.

Mobile Phone Infrastructure: Investment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4144/11-15, which locations her Department has identified as the areas in most need of investment in mobile phone infrastructure.
(AQW 4962/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No decisions on areas most in need of investment in mobile infrastructure have been taken at this stage and the extent to which my Department can address this issue will depend on securing funding through Broadband Delivery UK.

Work to identify such areas will be informed by a range of information sources. These include OFCOM's first Infrastructure Report to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and its mobile not-spots survey analysis. This will be supported by a mapping exercise which my Department will commission to examine the reach of existing mobile infrastructure and through discussions with the Mobile Network Operators to understand their investment plans.

The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 3713/11-15 and in light of her meeting with Minister Varadkar, whether she has any plans to commemorate 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming' in 2013 on an all-island basis; and whether she has any plans to stage events in Northern Ireland to mark this tourist initiative.
(AQW 5019/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no plans to mark "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming".

We have a number of exciting events planned for 2013, including the UK City of Culture in Londonderry and the World Police and Fire Games. These events will be our main focus during 2013.

Airports: Competition

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact on the economic interests of Northern Ireland of two airports, in a city the size of Belfast, competing against each other for international flights.
(AQW 5024/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not made any assessment of the economic impact of Belfast International Airport, or of Belfast City Airport. Competition between airports is a reserved matter for the competition authorities and commercial decisions in respect of international flights are a matter for airport owners.

Economic Policy: Centralised Control

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there is a policy to centralise control of economic policy in her Department.
(AQW 5064/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There is no plan to centralise responsibility for economic policy in any Department. The draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy was developed by the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy which I chair supported by the Ministers of Employment & Learning, Regional Development, Education and Finance & Personnel and the junior Ministers from OFMDFM.

The draft strategy includes commitments from all Departments and was agreed by the entire Executive.

Broadband Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much money is in the broadband fund; (ii) how much has been spent to date, broken down by each call for applications; (iii) which calls were successful for which areas; (iv) when the next call for applications will be made; (v) which area will benefit; and (vi) how much funding will be involved.
(AQW 5133/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The NI Broadband Fund was launched in 2008, with a budget of £1.9m to be spent over a five-year period. The amount currently committed under the Fund is £1,105,438.76. Details of commitments to 28 November 2011 and areas benefiting are as follows:

Call for applications	Committed to 28 November 2011	Areas
1st	£374,891.47	Rural west of NI, including: Eskragh, Broughderg, Greencastle (Co Tyrone), Gortin, Carrickmore, Cloghfin, Dregish, Drumquin, Plumbridge, Clady, Aghyarn, Ederny, Drum Manor, Coagh, Ballyronan, Tullyard, Sandholes, Ballinamallard, and Ballintoy
2nd	£0	No successful applicants
3rd	£177,434.77	North Sperrins, Foyle Basin, Fermanagh and South Tyrone
4th	£87,680.52	North Antrim coast and Enniskillen

Call for applications	Committed to 28 November 2011	Areas
5th	£250,000.00	Benburb, Crossmaglen, Downpatrick, Forkhill, Hillsborough, Larne and Newtownhamilton
6th	£215,432.00	Dungannon, Larne, Antrim, Fermanagh, Down, Armagh, Ballymena and Newry and Mourne

The Broadband Fund is co-financed under the European Regional Development Fund Sustainable Competitiveness Programme 2007-2013. At the beginning of 2011, Aid Intensity limits reduced, and this impacted significantly on the number of proposals coming forward under the recently completed 6th call.

I have, therefore, decided that there will be no further calls under the Fund and that the remaining funding will be re-designated to support my Department's telecoms investment priorities for 2011-2015, as published under a recent consultation exercise. These priorities are to deliver access to a minimum 2Mbps broadband service to all of Northern Ireland and to improve 3G mobile coverage. The money transferred from the Broadband Fund will be specifically used to support the 2Mbps target, thereby ensuring a structured rather than fragmented approach to the delivery of next generation broadband services into rural areas.

Broadband: Cabinet Technology

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the areas which are covered by installation of fibre to the cabinet technology.

(AQW 5134/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under my Department's Next Generation Broadband project, fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) technology offering download speeds of up to 40Mbps has been delivered to 1,256 cabinets across Northern Ireland – a further 9 cabinets will be upgraded by 31 January 2012. While the specific objective of this project is to bring higher speed services to 85% of Northern Ireland businesses, under the wholesale arrangements set down by the contract with BT, other service providers can access the BT infrastructure to deliver their own brand of fibred broadband products, which also includes services aimed at residential customers.

In addition, BT continues to invest in rollout of fibre to the cabinet technology under its "business as usual" programme. Details of the locations of the cabinets upgraded under contract to my Department can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com. Details of the full fibre rollout (including those under BT's additional investment plans) can be found at www.nibroadband.com.

Department of the Environment

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Enforcement

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place to ensure that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency informs individuals on whether enforcement issues they have reported have been address.

(AQW 2125/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): There is no central policy committing NIEA to provide follow up on every incident reported to it. The Agency will respond to those complainants who specifically request progress reports at the time. It will also reply to written correspondence on all subjects, including reported incidents, in line with its Customer Charter. Successful NIEA prosecutions are also notified to the general public through Press Releases issued at the end of a court case.

Not all incidents are significant enough to warrant further investigation, and not all are substantiated or proved to be genuine. Callers are informed of appropriate contacts for incidents that are not the responsibility of NIEA. Were the Agency to give feedback on all reports, given the number involved, already constrained resources would be put under further pressure, taking up time and staff that are more productively used in investigating breaches of environmental laws.

Since January 2011, NIEA's Environmental Crime Unit has received 402 reports of alleged incidents of unauthorised waste activities. However, I have asked advice that, subject to legal and anonymity issues, all reports should be formally followed up during or at the end of the complaint process.

Wind Turbines

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of the number of single wind turbine planning applications that have been refused; and (ii) to detail his Department's position on this form of renewable power generation.

(AQW 3273/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) for his assessment of the number of single wind turbine planning applications that have been refused;

Over the last three business years, 440 single wind turbine applications were approved. During the same period, 59 single wind turbine applications were refused; a refusal rate of 13.4%. A breakdown of decisions issued is set out in the table below.

Business Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Single Wind Turbine applications Refused	15	20	24	59
Single Wind Turbine applications Approved	225	103	112	440
Total	240	123	136	499

The single wind turbine applications were refused because it was considered that the proposals were contrary to planning policy on the grounds that they were detrimental to the visual amenity, residential amenity and character of the area and in terms of the adverse impact on places of heritage interest.

(ii) to detail his Department's position on this form of renewable power generation

PPS18 Renewable Energy sets out the Department's planning policy for development that generates energy from renewable resources and is supportive of renewable energy and technologies in appropriate locations. I am a strong supporter of renewable energy and that the intention and ambition of PPS18 needs to be achieved.

The Department welcomes the contribution that renewable power generators contribute to the drive to reduce carbon emissions and acknowledges the importance of processing these types of applications in a timely manner to ensure that timeframes for grant funding are not missed as a result of the planning process. A training programme is being rolled out to enable good and timely planning decisions. I will seek to ensure consistent and positive decisions consistent with good process and practice and will seek to identify where useful guidance can be issued.

First Steps Towards Sustainability – A Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland' (SDS) contains challenging targets for Northern Ireland above those set at international and national levels for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Department welcomes the contribution that renewable power generators contribute to the SDS. The renewable energy sector has the potential for massive growth and the Department recognises the long term benefits such developments can bring to both investors and consumers.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his Department's assessment of hydraulic fracturing as a means of extracting natural resources; and (ii) whether he is aware of this process being planned or carried out anywhere in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3413/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials within NIEA are currently supplementing their current knowledge of the process with emerging research by studying case studies from other parts of the world and by liaising with their counterparts in other Environment Agencies in countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place. I will be vigilant in relation to the potential of this process and rigorously assess law to proceed or not to proceed.

I am aware that a company, Tamboran Resources Pty Ltd, is currently exploring the viability of extracting natural gas from shale deposits in the south Fermanagh area using a hydraulic fracturing process. The project is commonly referred to as the 'Shale Gas Project'.

I am not aware of any fracking operations currently taking place within Northern Ireland.

Wind Farms

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for wind farms have been considered by the Omagh Planning Office in each of the last three years and, of these, how many have been approved.

(AQW 3416/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Omagh Planning Office has general responsibility for planning matters within the Council districts of Omagh, Dungannon and South Tyrone, Strabane, Fermanagh and Cookstown. However planning applications for wind farms are processed through the Renewable Energy Team based at Planning Headquarters in Belfast.

In 2009, 5 applications were considered and 4 were approved; in 2010, 7 applications were considered and were 7 approved; in 2011 to date, 4 applications have been considered and 4 have been approved.

In total within this three year period, 16 applications were considered and 15 were approved.

Anglers Monitoring Initiative

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the development of the Anglers Monitoring Initiative .

(AQW 3522/11-15)

Mr Attwood: An Anglers Monitoring Initiative (AMI) pilot project, based on the Ballinderry River, County Tyrone, is operated by Ballinderry River Enhancement Association (BREA) in conjunction with the Riverfly Partnership (RP) and is supported by NIEA. The pilot has been operational since February 2011.

AMI provides a simple monitoring technique that local groups/river users can use to detect pollution impacts on the biology of rivers. This can then be reported to NIEA in the event of agreed NIEA trigger levels being breached.

BREA secured funding and arranged purchase of the relevant equipment to take the pilot forward. A total of 22 volunteers have been recruited by BREA and have received training from the RP in the use of the technique and relevant health and safety requirements. The volunteers monitor 28 sites on a monthly basis.

NIEA involvement in the pilot to date includes:

- Attendance and support for the RP training;
- Provision of relevant water quality maps and data;
- Setting appropriate trigger levels for AMI sites (breaches of the trigger levels would be indicative of a serious pollution event at the site);
- Providing appropriate response to trigger level breaches and feedback as necessary.

A review of the pilot is planned for the end of 2011. The review will examine operational methods and experiences, the future scope of the project and options for extending the scheme into other river catchments.

Listed Buildings in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all listed buildings in the North Down area.
(AQW 3542/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Based upon the 1974 ward boundaries, which is how the Department holds such records, the total number of listed buildings in the North Down Borough Council Area is 257. The North Down constituency also includes two electoral wards of Ards Borough Council in Donaghadee, which contain a further 58 listed buildings (highlighted in bold). This gives a total of 315 listed buildings in your constituency.

To provide the detail of all of these listed buildings by hard copy would be unwieldy. The information you have sought may be accessed electronically at the following link www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm.

Once you have accepted the terms and conditions of the site, a search may be carried out by Council area – in this case Ards and North Down.

You will be aware, however, that there has been boundary changes since 1974, and therefore the figures should not be taken as definitive in relation to the current boundaries. For that reason I have appended, for your information, a table which shows the number of the listed buildings within each ward of the North Down and Ards Borough Council Areas.

You may also wish to note that NDBC – which are statutory consultees in the listing process - have been provided with a copy of each listing in their area, as the listing process has proceeded over the years since the introduction of the legislation in the early 1970's.

Number of Listed buildings in the North Down and Ards District Council Areas

HB23 - North Down		
1	Groomspoint	13
2	Churchill	1
3	Ballyholme	1
4	Ballymagee	1
5	Bangor Harbour	24
6	Conlig	4
7	Bangor Castle	24
8	Whitehill	
9	Rathgael	
10	Clandeboye	18
11	Silverstream	
12	Spring Hill	
13	Bryansburn	1
14	Princetown	16
15	Crawfordsburn	23
16	Craigavad	18
17	Loughview	6
18	Cultra	29
19	Hollywood Demesne	12

HB24 - Ards		
1	Portaferry	73
2	Kircubbin	22
3	Ballyhalbert	5
4	Grey Abbey	62
5	Carrowdore	6
6	Donaghadee North	26
7	Donaghadee South	32
8	Loughries	10
9	Movilla	5
10	Glen	3
11	Scrabo	16
12	Ulsterville	
13	Central	43
14	Comber North	
15	Comber South	32
16	Ballygowan	13
17	Killinchy	31

HB23 - North Down		
20	Hollywood Priory	66
	Total	257

HB24 - Ards		
	Total	379

DOE: Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3548/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions (AQs) and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

The rationale for this position has been previously set out by OFMdfM, as part of its written submission to the Procedures Committee on the cost of answering AQs, during the Committee's AQ Inquiry:

"The preparation of responses to Assembly Questions is an intrinsic part of the responsibilities of civil servants and has therefore not traditionally been separated out from other duties for a separate estimate of cost. Such costs, which would reflect only the departmental phase of processing the questions, would also vary in line with, for example, the nature of the question, the number of individual members of staff involved in preparing the reply and the involvement of other departments in providing information."

However, I have asked DOE officials to provide some headline estimates of costs incurred.

Wind Turbines

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of single wind turbine planning applications processed by the Omagh Planning Office that have been (i) refused; and (ii) approved in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3552/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below details the information requested.

	Approved	Refused	Total
2006/07	17	3	20
2007/08	25	4	29
2008/09	33	3	36
2009/10	20	8	28
2010/11	37	9	46
Total	132	27	159

Source: Planning NI

Wildfires

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in addressing the problem of wildfires.

(AQW 3556/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At my instigation, an Interdepartmental Group on Wildfires has been set up, comprising senior officials from NIEA, DARD, DRD and DHSSPS. The Group has met twice to date and is assembling information on the extent, scale and significance of seasonal wildfires and their cost to society. The Group is also looking at what additional measures can be put in place to prevent a re-occurrence of wildfires of the scale witnessed in April and May this year.

A report of their findings and recommendations will be presented to relevant Ministers by 31 January 2012.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the status within his Department of the Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers.

(AQW 3566/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers was completed on the 6 September 2011. I have not appointed a Special Adviser since this date. If it is necessary to appoint a new Special Adviser, I will follow the new guidance on the issue. I consider that it is right that, in the appointment of say Special Advisers, the requirements of victims have primacy. Moreover, the requirements of victims should be given greater priority and recognition in the conduct of government, politics and policy going forward, including appropriate legislative and administrative measures to reflect these requirements.

Smoke Control Areas

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to list the local councils which (i) operate; and (ii) do not operate smoke control zones.

(AQW 3598/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are 16 district councils with smoke control areas in operation and 10 which have not declared smoke control areas. These are as follows:-

District Councils with Smoke Control Areas:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ■ Antrim Borough Council | ■ North Down Borough Council |
| ■ Ards Borough Council | ■ Strabane District Council |
| ■ Armagh City & District Council | ■ District Councils which have not declared Smoke Control Areas |
| ■ Ballymena Borough Council | ■ Ballymoney Borough Council |
| ■ Belfast City Council | ■ Banbridge District Council |
| ■ Castlereagh Borough Council | ■ Carrickfergus Borough Council |
| ■ Coleraine Borough Council | ■ Cookstown District Council |
| ■ Craigavon Borough Council | ■ Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council |
| ■ Derry City Council | ■ Fermanagh District Council |
| ■ Down District Council | ■ Limavady Borough Council |
| ■ Larne Borough Council | ■ Magherafelt District Council |
| ■ Lisburn City Council | ■ Moyle District Council |
| ■ Newry & Mourne District Council | ■ Omagh District Council |
| ■ Newtownabbey Borough Council | |

Invasive Plant Species

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of the prevalence in Northern Ireland of (a) Japanese Knotweed; (b) Giant Hogweed; and (c) Himalayan Balsam; and (ii) how her Department is assisting in the (a) identification; (b) control and (c) eradication of these invasive plant species.

(AQW 3599/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department recognises the threat posed by invasive alien species to our native biodiversity and has been taking action to address this issue for several years.

The invasive plant species Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam have been present in Britain and Ireland since the early 19th century having first been introduced as ornamental garden plants. They subsequently escaped into the wider countryside and are now considered to be widely distributed. The Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR) hold records of invasive alien species which detail the spread of these plants both in time and distribution.

The three species are now widespread and are associated with river corridors and lake margins in all counties of Northern Ireland.

Officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) are working in partnership with Local Biodiversity Officers across Northern Ireland to deliver training on identification and management options for a range of invasive alien species including Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam to staff from a range of organisations including Councils, Roads Service, Rivers Agency, Translink and environmental NGOs. This training has also been provided to several local angling clubs.

As part of the Invasive Species Ireland Project, which is jointly funded by NIEA and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Dublin, a range of educational materials have been developed. There is also a dedicated website which provides information on identification and management options for a range of invasive alien species as well as an online facility to report sightings.

Earlier this year, the Department provided part funding to a £2.6 million InterReg IVa project, led by the Queen's University Belfast, which aims to control and, where possible, eradicate riparian invasive species from river catchments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland two river catchments are included in this project - the River Faughan and the Newry Canal/Clanrye River. In addition officials from NIEA have worked closely with a number of local community led initiatives to address problems created by invasive alien species.

Wind Turbines: Belfast Hills Partnership Guidelines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to ensure that the Belfast Hills Partnership guidelines for minimum assessment of wind turbine applications are followed in all parts of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3601/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The policy context against which the Department determines applications for wind turbines is contained within Planning Policy Statement 18 (PPS 18) Renewable Energy, PPS 18 Best Practice Guidance and Supplementary Planning Guidance "Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland Landscapes August 2010" (NIEA).

It is considered that the policy direction in PPS 18 for wind energy development addresses the possible impacts that the Belfast Hills Partnership want to see assessed.

Otter Numbers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the estimated population of otters, including their locations; and what action his Department is taking to protect the otter population.

(AQW 3608/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Otters are normally solitary, nocturnal, and cover large home ranges.

These behavioural characteristics can make population estimates of otters very difficult. As a result of this, the standard otter survey technique used throughout the UK and Europe is to use presence/absence surveys which are used to indicate whether or not an area has a resident otter population.

The methodology involves surveying river banks and recording signs of otter presence or absence. Spraints (droppings) tracks, holts, feeding remains and slides on banks are the normal signs of otter presence.

The data from presence/absence surveys can then be used to formulate distribution maps and an overall estimate of percentage occurrence can be made.

During 2010, the Department commissioned an otter survey of Northern Ireland. A total of 377 sites were surveyed, with otters detected at 344 sites (88.6%). This represents one of the highest densities in western Europe and is an overall increase of 26.9% from a previous survey undertaken in 2001/2.

Otters are fully protected under the terms of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

The Department ensures that any development that may impact on otters is fully assessed during the planning process and all relevant mitigation is implemented to minimise disturbance.

NIEA officials attend meetings of the UK Otter Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group and work to deliver targets and actions for otter protection in Northern Ireland.

Drink-driving Limit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to implement the lower alcohol limits for driving.

(AQW 3646/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On Monday 26 September 2011, I announced plans to bring forward a package of measures to tackle drink driving. Subject to Executive Committee agreement, the Department intends to have the drink drive legislation, in the form of a draft Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, ready for public consultation by March 2012.

I will consider the final provisions of the draft Bill on foot of the outcome of that consultation and I plan to seek introduction of the draft Bill to the Assembly before the end of 2012.

DOE: Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3693/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below provides details of travel costs incurred by departmental officials, split between the core department and agencies, and the Minister for the financial year 2010/11.

Travel Costs	£000's
Core Department	37,634
Planning Service	107,359
Northern Ireland Environment Agency	188,649
Driver and Vehicle Agency	278,513
Minister	7,550
Total	619,705

The figures include all mileage allowances claimed by staff on official duty as well as reimbursement of air, taxi, bus, rail and boat fares. A full breakdown is being prepared and will be released to the Member in due course.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the proposed runway extension at the George Best Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 3701/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Preparations for a public inquiry into the planning application to extend the runway at GBBCA are currently on hold pending receipt of further environmental information.

You may also be aware of my recent decision to initiate a public process to modify the existing Planning Agreement between the Department and GBBCA.

The modification process will include a public consultation on proposals for a noise management system, to be brought forward by the airport before the end of the year, and a Public Examination to independently consider all of the issues. After I have considered the independent report and recommendations of the Examination, I will decide what modifications should be included in the Planning Agreement. It is hoped that the process will be concluded by early Summer 2012.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of vehicles processed at each Driver and Vehicle Agency testing centre between 2005 and 2010.

(AQW 3716/11-15)

Mr Attwood: For the purpose of this response the number of vehicles processed is taken to mean all vehicles that undertook a full test and retest for the financial years 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The details for the requested period are included in the following table.

Test Centre	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Armagh	26,233	29,020	31,348	35,658	39,931	42,959
Ballymena	49,970	59,502	64,681	68,361	67,822	70,896
Belfast	75,589	81,738	79,120	87,134	97,958	103,164
Coleraine	53,329	54,292	57,162	61,030	62,882	67,790
Cookstown	51,264	53,153	51,850	59,588	59,841	62,349
Craigavon	36,937	41,863	47,761	52,243	52,421	56,251
Downpatrick	31,901	33,295	37,395	41,187	40,614	41,412
Enniskillen	33,877	36,114	39,499	43,380	43,887	47,014
Larne	29,483	31,690	34,727	40,313	36,664	38,963
Lisburn	41,967	44,139	47,580	52,884	53,913	57,968
Londonderry	45,066	52,900	56,728	61,741	66,559	69,112
Mallusk	61,180	66,496	59,125	67,584	75,694	77,340
Newry	52,146	56,272	57,726	64,035	67,353	71,899
Newtownards	77,902	91,015	90,703	98,896	96,653	101,256
Omagh	31,999	32,257	34,473	37,156	38,691	41,662
Total	698,843	763,746	789,878	871,190	900,883	950,035

Shale Gas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether the introduction of shale gas to the local market, from fracking in Co.Fermanagh, could have an impact on his Department's targets for reducing carbon emissions.

(AQW 3814/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not yet possible to fully assess the environmental impact of the potential availability of shale gas from Fermanagh on the Executive's greenhouse gas targets.

Officials in my Department are currently supplementing their knowledge of the process and awaiting the outcome of emerging research, commissioned by colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. The research will involve consideration of case studies from other parts of the world and liaison with other countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place.

The research will look at the regulatory approach in other countries and help the development of Best Environmental Practice for this type of operation. It should also better inform the assessment of the impact of shale gas on greenhouse gas emissions.

I will be vigilant in relation to the potential of this process and rigorously assess law to proceed or not to proceed.

Agricultural Buildings

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider increasing the permitted development size for agricultural buildings from 300m² every two years to 600m² every two years, or the removal of the two-year rule.

(AQW 3839/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The size of agricultural buildings allowed under permitted development is under review. In reaching a decision the Department will seek to balance agricultural business needs with the need to control the amenity impacts of large scale agricultural development. I intend to seek positive ways of moving forward.

Planning: Enforcement

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) with how many planning enforcements the Planning Service is currently dealing; and (ii) how many members of staff are working on these enforcements, broken down by Planning Office.

(AQW 3851/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of (i) enforcement cases currently under investigation by the Department and (ii) staff currently employed in enforcement broken down by Planning Office is set out in the table below.

Area Office	Number of Live Enforcement Cases	Number of Staff	
		Full time	Part time
Belfast	1251	6	0
South Antrim	257	4	0
Southern	1014	6	1
Northern	504	4	4
Western	333	4	0
HQ	299	3	2
Total	3658	27	7

There are also 10 senior officers at PPTO (Principal Planner) grade who manage the enforcement teams combined with their other duties in Development Management. They have not been included in the figures.

I confirm that I am currently developing a Human Resource Plan to address staffing issues and deployment. I believe that enforcement generally in DOE should have greater priority.

Plastic Bag Levy

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how much revenue the proposed levy on single use carrier bags is expected to generate in each of the next four years; and (ii) for his assessment of the impact of less revenue being generated than that factored into the 2011 Budget.

(AQW 3916/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have not yet determined the level at which the carrier bag levy will be set; in part at least, this will be influenced by the outcome of the consultation process. I am therefore unable to provide revenue projections for forward years at this point in time.

That said, economic modelling, for a range of possible charging levels, suggests that a levy confined to single use carrier bags is unlikely to raise the target revenue of £4 million per year. This is partly because it is likely that many consumers would switch to using cheaper versions of reusable bags. Such a scenario could lead to significant environmental harm, as well as impacting on revenue raised for environmental initiatives. For those reasons, I am proposing to bring forward new primary legislation which would allow the levy to be extended to include certain categories of reusable bags.

However, I would highlight that given the lead in time for the introduction of the levy, and the costs associated with the introduction of a levy, there is very little prospect of realising any additional income before 2014-15. This will create significant financial pressures which, if unaddressed, will inevitably impact on a number of important environmental programmes.

Wind Turbines

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if all the planning applications for the erection of wind turbines currently in the planning system were to be approved, what percentage this would be of the Executive's 2020 renewable energy target.

(AQW 3921/11-15)

Mr Attwood: If all the applications for the erection of wind turbines currently in the planning system were to be approved, this would contribute to an installed capacity of approximately 860MW, which when combined with the existing installed onshore wind would equate to approximately 75% of the 2020 target. However, it should be noted that this is an approximation as not all of the applications for wind turbines in the system include installed capacity and/or energy rating.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.
(AQW 3928/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I would refer Mr Easton to a reply that he recently received on 30 September 2011 containing an update on BMAP

To provide an update on recent progress, I can confirm that my Department received further reports from the Planning Appeals Commission on North Down District and Lagan Valley Regional Park Proposals on 27 September 2011. The reports on two BMAP Districts currently remain outstanding i.e. Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus.

The date that BMAP will be adopted will be dependent on when the PAC Report is received in its entirety. At present it is anticipated that adoption will not take place before the end of 2012.

Environmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the environmental grants currently available from his Department.
(AQW 3929/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department administers a number of environmental grants which are detailed below:

Natural Heritage Grants

The Natural Heritage Grant Programme aims to encourage the conservation and enhancement of key elements of the environment and its wildlife. The programme is run annually on a competitive basis.

Listed Building Grants

The Listed Building Grant Programme is available to fund the repairs and maintenance of all types of secular listed buildings and also for churches at Grade B+ and above.

Anti Litter Grant

This grant is provided to Tidy Northern Ireland to assist with Core funding and the funding of various anti litter projects across Northern Ireland.

Noise Act Grant

This grant was available to district councils who adopted the provisions of the Noise Act 1996. The relevant provisions have been replaced by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 and therefore there will be no requirement to pay this grant to councils from 2012-13 onwards.

Local Air Quality Management Grant

This grant is available to district councils who meet the Department's criteria for managing and monitoring air quality within their council area. Councils may apply annually for this grant.

Clean Air Grant

This grant is payable to district councils as a contribution towards the costs of assisting owner/occupiers within Smoke Control Areas who convert their properties to burn smokeless fuels. There are no clean air grant schemes currently in operation. If a new Smoke Control Area was to be declared by a council, a grant scheme would be offered to owner/occupiers.

Waste Infrastructure Grant

This grant comprises funding allocated to offset the cost to councils of the expenditure associated with procurement of the waste infrastructure projects which three Waste Management Groups are taking forward on their behalf in order to achieve statutory landfill diversion targets. This funding is ring fenced and each of the Waste Management Groups bids for funding at the start of each financial year.

Taxis: Roadworthiness

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many taxis inspected by his Department's Enforcement Officers in each of the last three years were found to be unroadworthy, broken down by (a) public; and (b) private hire taxis; and (ii) to detail the reasons for unroadworthiness.

(AQW 3945/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The numbers of taxis found to be unroadworthy in the last three years, broken down between public and private hire taxis and by the reasons for unroadworthiness, were as follows:

Number of Taxis with Roadworthiness Defects

	Apr 09-Mar 10	Apr 10-Mar 11	Apr 11-Sep 11
Taxis with roadworthiness defects	218	373	177
Private hire taxis with roadworthiness defects	n/a*	338	160
Public hire taxis with roadworthiness defects	n/a*	35	17

Roadworthiness Defects Breakdown

	Apr 09-Mar 10		Apr 10-Mar 11		Apr 11-Sep 11	
	Public Hire	Private Hire	Public Hire	Private Hire	Public Hire	Private Hire
Braking	n/a*	n/a*	11	69	8	28
Steering	n/a*	n/a*	15	39	9	20
Lighting	n/a*	n/a*	23	243	19	122
Wheels/Tyres	n/a*	n/a*	17	237	8	122
Other Defects	n/a*	n/a*	18	124	5	59

* In relation to the period April 2009 to March 2010, information on the breakdown of defects would need to be manually extracted from a large number of files held by DVA, and has therefore not been included. An enforcement database was introduced in April 2010 to facilitate the analysis of key statistical information.

Schools: Overtaking of Buses

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment whether it is illegal for drivers to overtake a parked (i) Education and Library Board school bus; or (ii) Translink school bus which display the appropriate signage on the rear of the bus.

(AQW 3946/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not an offence for drivers to overtake a parked Education and Library school bus or Translink school bus which display the appropriate signage.

The objective of the new signage and warning lights is to make motorists more aware of how to identify a school bus that is picking up or dropping off school children and, accordingly, to take care when passing a bus due to the risk of children emerging. To raise awareness, the regulatory change was supported by a media educational campaign at the time and again for the 'back to school' period in September.

Dalways Bawn Towers, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress made for the towers at Dalway's Bawn, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 3968/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Dalways Bawn is an impressive seventeenth century-fortification, set at a roadside location in the northern hinterland of Carrickfergus. It is thought to have been built by John Dalway around 1609 and three of the four stone towers built by Dalway still survive. These towers have been in guardianship by the Department since December 1973 and the Department has carried out ongoing maintenance and conservation works since that time.

At present some urgent works are to be undertaken within the north tower in order to fix a leak in the roof. Some non-urgent vegetation removal is also planned for this financial year. The site remains in private ownership but, as you are aware, was sold to a new owner in 2007. There was contact between the Department and the new owner in 2007-08 and it was agreed that the towers would remain in guardianship.

The new owner investigated the possibility of developing the site and adjacent lands. I am advised that officials from NIEA met with the new owner and his agents at that time, noting that any new development would have to enhance the condition of the heritage assets at the site and improve public access. New development and heritage enhancement can and should work hand-in-hand to the benefit of the local community and economy. NIEA have had no contact from the owner, about proposed development at the site since 2008, and are not aware of any planning application having been made.

With regard to future plans for the towers, NIEA welcomes and has been integral to the recent creation of the Carrickfergus Heritage Steering Group. The group has been set up in partnership (primarily) between NIEA and Carrickfergus Borough Council and, it is hoped, the local chamber of Commerce, in order to further education, enjoyment and the economic potential of the built heritage within the local area. NIEA is keen to work with the newly inaugurated Carrickfergus Heritage Steering Group to discuss the future of Dalways Bawn and the various other local heritage sites.

Invasive Plant or Tree Species

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department intends to deal with invasive plant or tree species; and to detail the species involved.

(AQW 3981/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department recognises the threat posed by invasive alien species to our native biodiversity and has been taking action to deal with invasive plant species over many years.

NIEA has worked in partnership with the Republic's National Parks and Wildlife Service since 2003 on the Invasive Species Ireland Project, through which a risk assessment has been undertaken for 834 established and potential invasive alien species (plants and animals). Of the highest risk species identified management plans have been developed for 16 plant species to date (Table 1). These management plans outline the current best practice control options for use by landowners and land managers.

For many years NIEA has actively undertaken control of a wide range of invasive alien species across the properties it owns and manages. Species controlled on these properties include Rhododendron ponticum shrub, cherry laurel shrub, Japanese knotweed, giant knotweed, Himalayan balsam, salmonberry, floating pennywort, curly waterweed, Parrot's feather, bamboo, Australian swamp-stonecrop, sycamore tree, American skunk cabbage, pirri-pirri bur, piggy-back plant, beech tree, snowberry, winter heliotrope and the common cord grass.

Earlier this year, the Department provided part funding to a £2.6 million InterReg IVa project, led by the Queen's University Belfast, which aims to control and, where possible, eradicate Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam from river catchments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland two river catchments are included in this project - the River Faughan and the Newry Canal/Clanrye River.

In August 2011, following an extensive review, the Department made amendments to the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 which regulates the introduction of non-native species under Article 15. These amendments included the addition of 29 invasive plant species to the Schedule 9 list of species to which Article 15 applies. These amendments bring the total number of plant species listed on Schedule 9 to 36 plant species, including all hybrids of those species listed (Table 2).

To ensure that others are encouraged to control invasive alien species on their properties, officials in NIEA are also working in partnership with Local Biodiversity Officers across Northern Ireland to deliver training on identification and management options for a range of species including the more commonly occurring Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam to staff from a wide range of organisations.

Table 1: Plant species for which management plans have been developed

■ Fringed waterlily	■ Floating pennywort
■ Giant rhubarb	■ Japanese kelp (wakame)
■ Hottentot fig	■ Water primrose
■ Australian swamp stonecrop	■ Common cord grass
■ Parrot's feather	■ Rhododendron ponticum
■ Water fern	■ Cherry Laurel
■ Himalayan balsam	■ Japanese knotweed
■ Giant hogweed	■ Himalayan balsam

Table 2: Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 Schedule 9

Added following amendment in August 2011

■ Himalayan balsam	■ Australian swamp stonecrop
■ Spanish bluebell	■ Water chestnut
■ Skunk cabbage	■ Water fern
■ Dwarf Eelgrass	■ Water lettuce
■ Fanwort	■ Water primrose
■ Hottentot fig	■ Water soldier
■ Japanese honeysuckle	■ Fringed waterlily
■ Japanese kelp	■ Waterweeds (all Elodea species)
■ Himalayan knotweed	■ Curly waterweed
■ Few-flowered leek	■ Large flowered waterweed
■ Mile-a-minute weed	■ Salmonberry
■ Parrot's feather	
■ Floating pennywort	
■ Giant rhubarb	
■ Giant salvinia	
■ Sea buckthorn	

Vehicle Licensing: Zero-rated Discs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of zero-rated motor vehicle tax discs issued in each of the last three years to vehicles classed as classic or vintage, broken down by (i) motor cars; (ii) commercial vehicles; (iii) agricultural tractors; and (iv) motor cycles.

(AQW 4119/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under a formal agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport.

For vehicle registration and licensing there is an 'historic vehicle' tax class. A vehicle qualifies to enter into the historic class if it was constructed or manufactured before 1973 and falls within the qualifying list. While a vehicle licensed in the historic tax class is exempt from a licence fee, it must display a valid nil licence on the vehicle, where no current statutory off road notification (SORN) is in force.

In each of the last three years the Agency has issued the following exempt licences.

Year	Motor Cars	Commercial Vehicles	Agricultural Tractors	Motor Cycles
2009	4,728	266	1,687	2,851
2010	4,881	276	1,825	3,107
2011	4,626	257	1,737	2,932
Total	14,235	799	5,249	8,890

Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether he is aware of the concerns of local residents that the works carried out at Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock, may not correspond with the planning approval Y/2007/0475F, Y/2009/0088F, Y/2010/0499F, Y/2011/0199F; and (ii) how he will ensure that any breaches of the planning permission are resolved with the cooperation of, and to the satisfaction of local residents.

(AQW 4383/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning permission was granted for a replacement school on 19 June 2008 under planning reference Y/2007/0475/F. Associated applications for temporary car parking arrangements and floodlighting to the synthetic pitch were subsequently approved in 2009 and 2011 respectively. The Department is currently considering an application for Provision of 5 no. CCTV cameras on mounted columns under planning reference Y/2011/0199/F.

The Department has been contacted by local residents regarding alleged breaches of planning control at the new school and is currently investigating these allegations. Whilst these matters are under investigation I am unable to provide you with specific details because disclosure, at this stage may prejudice current enforcement action.

I can however advise that planning application Y/2011/0355/F has been recently submitted for amendments to the previous approval which includes enhanced landscaping and boundary treatment. The application will provide an opportunity for people to comment following neighbour notification and advertisement in the local press. I can, however, assure you that the processing of a planning application does not preclude other enforcement action.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will enforce the seats for sale clause in the George Best Belfast City Airport's Planning Agreement, in light of the recent High Court ruling which quashed the previous Minister's decision to remove the clause.

(AQW 4487/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Information provided by George Best Belfast City Airport indicates that the seats for sale figure, is below the 2 million cap. Enforcement does not arise at this time. My officials will actively monitor the airport's compliance with the restriction and I will ensure that they do so. If an issue arises I will robustly consider the matter.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will enforce the late nights flights clause in the George Best Belfast City Airport's Planning Agreement, which states that flights are not supposed to take off or land after 21.30, other than 'in exceptional circumstances'; and to define exceptional circumstances.

(AQW 4488/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Information provided by George Best Belfast City Airport indicates that there have been 331 delayed air traffic movements (ATMs) after 21.30 this year to the end of October. This represents 0.91% of total ATMs. I have instructed that every two months, information on delayed ATMs is provided to the Department. I am looking at how to distribute this information more widely.

There is no stated definition of "exceptional circumstances" but the Department considers these to include issues such as bad weather and technical problems at point of take off. I will, of course, be highly vigilant about this issue.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Planning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the nature of the inquiry into modifying the George Best Belfast City Airport's Planning Agreement, including (i) the status of the inquiry; (ii) the terms of reference; (iii) the inquiry's structure; and (iv) whether legal representation and cross-examination will be permitted.

(AQW 4489/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The modification process will include a public consultation on proposals for a noise management system, to be brought forward by the airport before the end of the year, and a Public Examination to independently consider all of the issues. After I have considered the independent report and recommendations of the Examination, I will decide what modifications should be included in the Planning Agreement.

My officials are currently considering a number of issues in relation to the process for modifying the Planning Agreement including the terms of reference for the public examination into the proposals and the appropriate procedure for conducting the examination. I will make the details of the process known, including the terms of reference, when I have decided on the appropriate way forward.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Planning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the seats for sale clause in the George Best Belfast City Airport's Planning Agreement has been reinstated and implemented.

(AQW 4490/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The seats for sale restriction has been reinstated into the Planning Agreement and remains in force at the airport.

Planning Policy Statement 18

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the implementation of PPS 18 by the Planning Service.

(AQO 858/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy' was published in August 2009 and sets out the planning policy for development that generates energy from renewable resources. The PPS aims to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environments.

I have requested that the Department carries out training for planning officers to ensure that the policies contained within PPS18 are applied consistently throughout Northern Ireland. Officials are in the process of compiling the training programme which will be delivered to staff over the coming months.

To ensure a consistent approach to the interpretation and operation of policy, Area Offices raise relevant matters at the monthly Development Management Working Group, where all Area Offices are represented (at principal level), and an agreed position will be confirmed by the Group.

I have been advised that in the first quarter of 2011/12, the Department has approved over 90% of all renewable energy planning applications decided within this period.

These figures reinforce the Department's aim of facilitating the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environments to contribute to the achievement of the Executive's target of 40% of electricity consumption coming from renewable resources by 2020.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has held discussions with the Department for Transport about the possibility of diverting additional workload to County Hall, Coleraine as part of a long term strategy to develop further the skills base there.

(AQO 859/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter for which responsibility rests with the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered here by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under the terms of a formal agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport.

Under this agreement DVA undertakes vehicle licensing and registration work in Coleraine and from eight local offices on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea.

DVA currently undertakes the full range of vehicle licensing and enforcement functions in Northern Ireland, and staff in Coleraine and at the local offices have the full range of skills required to undertake any vehicle licensing work required, using the existing IT system.

DVLA is currently examining how the separate IT systems in Britain and in Northern Ireland could be integrated. No decisions have yet been made about integration or about how any such integrated system could be used to deliver vehicle licensing services in Northern Ireland. However, I have both met with and written to Mike Penning, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, about the future delivery of vehicle licensing in Northern Ireland. I have made and will continue to make the case that we should have the full range of services for our customers, that all jobs should be protected and, in the event of any future integration, NI should be given new functions to secure and enhance our job numbers.

Local Government: Reform

Ms Lewis asked the Minister of the Environment what efficiencies could be achieved through reforms to Local Government.
(AQO 860/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) economic appraisal of 2009 identified a number of efficiency opportunities as part of the implementation of the reform programme. The most significant of these efficiencies is the rationalization of council posts, functions and structures.

In addition, based on the sector's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) programme a number of service delivery efficiencies covering Customer-Facing Services, Information and Communication Technologies, Human Resources, Payroll and Procurement have been identified for detailed analysis.

The ICE programme could provide savings of up to £570million over 25 years, more than reorganisation itself. The two arms of reduced costs – ICE and RPA – give a fresh opportunity to assess the right configuration and numbers of councils going forward.

Taxi Operator's Licence

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on proposals for the introduction of a taxi operator's licence.
(AQO 861/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am considering the proposed fees for taxi operator licensing and intend to introduce taxi operator licensing as soon as I am satisfied that the fee for the licensing regime is fair and equitable for all operators and that it does not place an undue financial burden on the taxi industry in these difficult economic times.

Planning: Environment Agency

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the extent to which the opinion of the Environment Agency should influence planning applications.
(AQO 863/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The comments of the Environment Agency (NIEA) are a key part of the development management process.

The Service level Agreement (SLA) between DOE Planning and NIEA sets out the basis on which DOE Planning Division and NIEA will deliver services to each other in respect of development management consultations.

The scope of the SLA is to ensure that consultation is carried out in accordance with the best standards of both DOE Planning and NIEA so that all information provided meets requirements.

It should be noted that the final determination in relation to a planning application rests with DOE Planning who will make the decision having considered all relevant material considerations. This point is crucial and is one I have explained to planning officials – the planners make decisions having regards to the views of consultees and others.

Metal Theft (Prevention) Bill

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider introducing legislation similar to the Metal Theft (Prevention) Bill currently going through Parliament.
(AQO 864/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In England and Wales scrap metal operations are controlled under two distinct legislative areas: under the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1964 and the Environmental Permitting regime.

The proposed Metal Theft (Prevention) Bill in England and Wales is intended to amend the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1964 with a view to providing a more robust regime and regulatory requirements on scrap metal dealers, without causing any significant impact to law abiding dealers. The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1964 is, essentially, a criminal law and only applies to England and Wales. If similar legislation were to be considered here, this would not be within the remit of DOE.

However, there are a number of relevant environmental legislative provisions. In Britain these are provided for under the Environmental Permitting regime and equivalent provisions are already in place in Northern Ireland by way of the Waste Management Licensing (NI) Regulations 2003 and the Pollution Prevention and Control (NI) Regulations 2003, which require scrap dealers to have either a Waste Management Licence or a Pollution Prevention and Control Permit.

On enforcement, where metals are stolen the PSNI enforce in respect of theft and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in respect of waste management. Both PSNI and NIEA liaise as a routine part of their work to identify illegal activity and where possible assist operationally.

I have written to the Justice Minister with a view to the two Departments liaising further on what other measures can be taken to minimise the risk of metal theft. I will consider further the option of new legislation on this matter.

MOT: Changes to Test

Mr Brady asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the introduction of changes to the MOT test, whether test centres will be able to accommodate the extra work load.

(AQO 865/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency intends to adopt a phased approach to implementation of the proposed changes to the MOT test, and from 1 February to 30 April 2012 defects relating to the new test items will not result in failure: instead the examiner will advise the customer that any defect should be rectified. The advisory period will give the Agency the opportunity to assess the workload involved. However, the preparatory work done by the Agency to date has suggested that the new test items can be incorporated into the current testing process without any material impact on capacity.

It should be clearly understood – the additional requirements arise from EU responsibility. The requirements do not extend to all vehicles. For private vehicles, the new requirements are partly an upgrade in existing MOT tests e.g. breaking quality or development of tests on warning lights. This should not add greatly to the costs of preparation of a vehicle or create particular difficulties for mechanics who are already carrying out very similar preparation for cars under the existing regime.

MOT: Changes to Test

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment what analysis has been carried out on the road safety benefits from the additional checks proposed for MOT tests.

(AQO 866/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The additional checks proposed for MOT tests are required by European Commission Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC (as amended). The Department must implement such Directives to avoid possible infraction proceedings and resultant fines.

The EC commissions extensive road safety research and analysis to address road traffic collisions and vehicle defects. This leads to development of proposals for EC requirements providing benefits for road users, such as those contained in the Roadworthiness Directive.

The Department for Transport negotiates such proposals with the EC on behalf of the UK and consults with the Department during their development.

Belfast International Airport: Illegal Car Parks

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment how he intends to deal with the problem of illegal car parks in the vicinity of Belfast International Airport.

(AQO 867/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department is aware of 13 car parks that have been or currently are operating outside the lands zoned for such uses around the Belfast International Airport.

As a result of effective enforcement action, 6 of the sites of unauthorised car parks in this area have ceased to operate and 1 is operating within the terms of their existing planning approval, granted by the Planning Appeals Commission.

My Department is currently investigating the operation of the other 6 unauthorised car parks in the vicinity of the airport.

Of these 4 have been served with enforcement notices and are the subject of appeals.

The other 2 are the subject of current planning applications.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Car Parking Spaces for Civil Servants

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action is being taken to reduce the number and cost of providing car parking spaces for civil servants and encouraging the use of park and ride and car sharing facilities.

(AQW 2076/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Department of Finance and Personnel is committed to achieving a ten percent reduction per annum in the number of leased car parking spaces provided to Departments through the current budget period (FY11/12-FY14/15). Furthermore, DFP has undertaken a rationalisation of the car parking provision to reduce the costs per space. These actions have resulted in a reduction in the annual DFP spend on car parking of over £500k per annum over the last four years.

A number of schemes operate across the NICS to promote 'park and ride' and car sharing. Examples are:

- Travelwise NI - A DRD scheme to encourage car sharing across the NICS;
- The Stormont Estate Transport Group which promotes more efficient and environmentally friendly use of transport by staff.

Car Parking Spaces for Civil Servants

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number and cost of car parking spaces provided for civil servants, broken down by each town and city; and (ii) when each allocation was last assessed to determine whether the space was essential.

(AQW 2077/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number and cost of car parking spaces provided for civil servants is as follows:

Town / City	Number of Spaces	Total
Belfast	1,006	£997,583
Londonderry	8	£3,200
Lisburn	19	£5,180
Omagh	93	£22,912
Armagh	29	£3,999
Banbridge	30	£6,399
Total	1,185	£1,039,273

All Departments review the need for spaces on an annual basis

Tax Credit for Companies

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the proposed tax credit for companies which take on new employees aged between 16-24 years.

(AQW 4163/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The increases we have seen in youth unemployment over recent years are a significant cause for concern. It is important, therefore, that every effort is taken to ensure that employment opportunities are maximised and that our young people are not exposed to sustained periods of unemployment. The Northern Ireland Executive is committed to doing everything within its powers to both rebuild and rebalance our economy in order to improve the economic prospects for all our people.

Clearly I would welcome any other measures the Government might introduce nationally to help tackle this specific problem of youth unemployment. However, as Taxation is a Reserved Matter, the merits of the CBI proposal would be a matter for the Government to determine.

DFP: Air Travel

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total cost incurred by his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4339/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The total cost incurred by DFP on air travel between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010 was £52,302.95.

The total cost incurred by DFP on air travel between Northern Ireland and all other airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010 was £51,362.97.

DFP: Assembly Questions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4598/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions.

Single Farm Payments: Disallowance

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development about the costs associated with the European Commission disallowance of Single Farm Payments.

(AQO 882/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have engaged with the Agriculture Minister on a number of occasions on both the financial implications of the disallowance and the measures which DARD can put in place to minimise the risk of future penalties. My officials continue to monitor the situation closely and are working with DARD officials to ensure the best resolution for the Executive.

Public Sector Jobs: Bain Report

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many of the Bain Report recommendations on the decentralisation of public sector jobs have been implemented.

(AQO 874/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Professor Sir George Bain's report of his review of policy on the location of public sector jobs in Northern Ireland has never been accepted as Executive policy and therefore its recommendations have not been implemented.

Tax

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has requested figures from the Treasury on the total tax collected in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 870/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No, I have not specifically requested figures from the Treasury on the total amount of tax collected in Northern Ireland. However, my Department produces estimates of tax revenues raised in Northern Ireland as part of the Net Fiscal Balance Report. The most recent figures for 2008-09 indicate that the total public sector revenue in Northern Ireland was some £13 billion.

DFP: Civil Law Functions

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether the civil law functions of his Department should be transferred to the Department of Justice.

(AQO 875/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department currently shares responsibility for law reform with the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice sponsors the Northern Ireland Law Commission, which includes within its remit the reform of both the civil and criminal law. My Department has a responsibility for civil law reform and the policy on the regulation of the profession of solicitors. I have no immediate plans with regard to the transfer of these functions.

Public Procurement: Social Clauses

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what advice the Central Procurement Directorate has given to Departments on the inclusion of social clauses in public procurement contracts.

(AQO 876/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Procurement Board, which I chair, published guidance on integrating equality of opportunity and sustainable development into public sector procurement in 2008. This guidance was approved by the Executive and was aimed at helping departments, NDPBs and agencies meet their statutory obligations in relation to equality and sustainable development in all contracts.

Social clauses were subsequently developed by the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland (CIFNI) and have been included in government construction contracts from 2008. This work, led by the Central Procurement Directorate, was aimed at encouraging the economically inactive back into the work place and encouraging training and skills development. These requirements were incorporated within a guidance note which issued in November 2010.

Following the economic downturn social clauses were revised to include more opportunities for apprentices and student placements as well as training opportunities for the unemployed. These came into operation in September 2011.

Small Businesses

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what further assistance his Department is considering providing for small businesses.

(AQO 877/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department recently completed consultation on proposals that would significantly extend the small business rate relief scheme through to 31 March 2015. The original proposals were conditional on this being funded through a large retail levy.

The intention is to double the total relief provided under the main small business rate relief scheme and increase the number receiving help by around 50%. Additional support of around £6.5m would be provided, at 2011/12 levels, to slightly under 9,000 additional businesses. This would provide an average award of around £730 per year. As with the current scheme any additional relief would be provided automatically.

While some would wish any additional help to last longer than three years, it is important to recognise that the proposals were put forward as a response to the downturn. This would also take us up until the next revaluation; which will redistribute the rating

burden so that sectors and locations that have fared better than others will pay more and those that have not fared as well will pay less.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel is currently undertaking evidence sessions on the policy proposals. I will be taking into account the views of the Committee before reaching final decisions, following which I will present recommendations to the Executive. I would intend to announce final decisions on the way forward by mid December, subject to Executive consideration.

Governor of the Bank of England

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on his meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England.
(AQO 878/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Northern Ireland needs a competitive banking sector that can meet the needs of businesses and consumers here. I have been pressing for some time now on the need to restore bank lending to our Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. The liquidity of the banking sector is key to that and the Government and the Bank of England have been taking steps nationally in that regard.

However, I have been concerned that the extent of our foreign ownership in our banking sector might be limiting the effectiveness of these initiatives in Northern Ireland. That is why I sought a meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England which as the Member is aware took place on 16 November 2011.

We discussed the particular issues faced by the Northern Ireland banking sector, including how future regulatory requirements might be applied, and the operation of current and forthcoming financial initiatives to improve liquidity. In particular, I asked Sir Mervyn to consider what mechanisms might be put in place to ensure the benefits of these are felt here in Northern Ireland. I also asked him to consider the need for the Bank to publish regional lending data and he gave a commitment to do so.

Special EU Programmes

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the revised process to assist with the distribution of Special EU Programme monies.
(AQO 879/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The INTERREG IVA Programme has been slow to commit and spend funds. Officials from my Department, the other Northern Ireland Departments accountable for INTERREG funding, and the SEUPB have been working to identify and implement improvements. This process is ongoing and will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

An important change DFP has recently made has to do with the way in which projects originating with the Local Authority-based Groups are processed. Initially, projects originating with the Groups had to apply for assistance under three separate Programme themes—the Enterprise and Tourism themes for which DETI is the accountable department in Northern Ireland, and Collaboration between Public Sector Bodies, for which DFP is accountable. We have recently simplified this arrangement so that all applications from the Groups are now processed as Collaboration projects with DFP as accountable department. In effect, there is now a 'one stop shop' for local projects.

An important change that DETI have made is to revise the assessment and approval process to ensure there is no duplication of effort. These changes relate to the economic appraisal of applications, a key (and relatively costly) stage in the assessment process.

I understand £9 million worth of projects has recently been approved by Steering Committees under these revised arrangements and the 19 applications still under assessment will be fully processed early in the New Year.

Corporation Tax

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the discussions his Department has had with Treasury in relation to the devolution of corporation tax powers.
(AQO 880/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As the Member will be aware, a Ministerial Working Group has been established to take the devolution of Corporation Tax and wider rebalancing work forward. The first meeting of that group has been scheduled for 15 December 2011 and my officials have been working with the Treasury and their counterparts in OFMDFM and DETI to develop a draft Terms of Reference for the group and a programme for the work that is required to resolve the outstanding issues around cost and implementation before a decision can be taken. We will be seeking to agree these with the Government at the meeting on 15 December 2011. The draft Programme for Government commits the Executive to pressing the Government for a decision on this issue through the Ministerial Working Group.

Tax-varying Powers

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what tax varying powers, other than Corporation Tax, have been considered for possible devolution to the Assembly.
(AQO 881/11-15)

Mr Wilson: We have been pressing the Government to consider the how the full range of currently reserved policy levers might be used to help rebalance the Northern Ireland economy as part of its consultation in this regard. In particular, we have raised a number of non corporation tax options with the Treasury such as: streamlining business regulation; R&D tax credits, investment allowances or national insurance holidays. Separate discussions with the Government are also ongoing in relation to the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme and the Carbon Floor Tax.

In terms, of devolving increased powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly, clearly the focus to date has been on Corporation Tax. However, I have consistently said we must look at all the options available to us, and indeed the Government is already considering some of these nationally. I will be looking for this work to be taken forward as part of the work of the recently established Ministerial Working Group.

Members will also be aware that we have agreed with the Government that Air Passenger Duty will be devolved and discussions on the scope and precise arrangements for the devolution of these powers are ongoing.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Cardiac Surgical Operations

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cardiac surgical operations have been carried on patients resident in Northern Ireland who have surgery in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; and (iii) Great Britain in each of the last five years

(AQW 4367/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The total number of major cardiac surgical episodes performed in Belfast HSC Trust in each of the last five years is as follows;

Year	Cardiac Surgical Episodes
2006/07	846
2007/08	920
2008/09	1,006
2009/10	911
2010/11	968

Source: HSC Board

Cardiac Surgery carried out outside of Northern Ireland would fall into the category of 'major cardiac procedures' therefore the figures above are based only on major procedures carried out in Northern Ireland to allow for comparability.

The number of cardiac surgical operations that have been carried out on patients resident in Northern Ireland who have had surgery in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain is shown in the table below;

Year	Patients Resident in Northern Ireland who had Cardiac Surgery in the Republic of Ireland	Patients Resident in Northern Ireland who had Cardiac Surgery in Great Britain
2006/07	*	*
2007/08	159	91
2008/09	368	38
2009/10	190	109
2010/11	160	50

Source: HSC Board

* The Belfast Trust was established in 2007/08. The information for 2006/07 would need to be retrieved via legacy and board is not readily available.

Intensive Care Ventilators

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 April 2009 and 31 December 2009, which have been returned to the supplier; (ii) the date on which each ventilator was returned; and (iii) the amount recovered from the supplier, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4461/11-15)

Mr Poots: Ten paediatric intensive care ventilators purchased as part of the preparation to meet expected additional surge capacity during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic were returned to the manufacturer on 29 September 2011. This was part of a buy-back option negotiated with the manufacturer and subsequently a sum of £84,280 (plus VAT) was recouped by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

One hundred intensive care ventilators (plus associated equipment) were purchased between 1 April and 31 December 2009 at a total cost of £4.3m. Of these, 13 were purchased as direct replacements of older stock; 87 were purchased as additional stock to enable Trusts to expand their critical care capacity to meet the demands of the pandemic at that time, but also to enhance capacity to meet other surge demands such as annual winter pressures.

Eleven paediatric intensive care ventilators have not been used to date but remain available for use by Trusts to meet any future surge demands. A breakdown of information by Trust area is outlined in the table below.

Table: Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 April and 31 December 2011, broken down by Trust area

Trust	Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 Apr. and 31 Dec. 2009	Were these purchased as		How many ventilators remained unused between 31 Dec. 2010 and 31 Oct. 2011?
		direct replacements of existing stock?	additional stock?	
BHSCT Adult	18	-	18	0
Paeds	21*	1	20	6
Neonatal	6	-	6	0
NHSCT Adult	7	-	7	0
Paeds	2	-	2	2
Neonatal	2	-	2	0
SEHSCT Adults	16	12	4	0
Paeds	4	-	4	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
SHSCT Adult	4	-	4	0
Paeds	8	-	8	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
WHST Adult	2	-	2	0
Paeds	3	-	3	3
Neonatal	1	-	1	0
Totals	100	13	87	11

* 10 of these paediatric intensive care ventilators were placed in sealed storage and returned as part of the buy-back option which was exercised in Sept. 2011

Intensive Care Ventilators

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number and cost of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 April 2009 and 31 December 2009; and, of these, how many were purchased as (a) direct replacements; or (b) additional stock; and (ii) how many of the ventilators remained unused between 31 December 2010 and 31 October 2011, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4463/11-15)

Mr Poots: Ten paediatric intensive care ventilators purchased as part of the preparation to meet expected additional surge capacity during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic were returned to the manufacturer on 29 September 2011. This was part of a buy-back option negotiated with the manufacturer and subsequently a sum of £84,280 (plus VAT) was recouped by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

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		direct replacements of existing stock?	additional stock?	
BHSCT Adult	18	-	18	0

Trust	Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 Apr. and 31 Dec. 2009	Were these purchased as		How many ventilators remained unused between 31 Dec. 2010 and 31 Oct. 2011?
		direct replacements of existing stock?	additional stock?	
Paeds	21*	1	20	6
Neonatal	6	-	6	0
NHSCT Adult	7	-	7	0
Paeds	2	-	2	2
Neonatal	2	-	2	0
SEHSCT Adults	16	12	4	0
Paeds	4	-	4	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
SHSCT Adult	4	-	4	0
Paeds	8	-	8	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
WHSCT Adult	2	-	2	0
Paeds	3	-	3	3
Neonatal	1	-	1	0
Totals	100	13	87	11

* 10 of these paediatric intensive care ventilators were placed in sealed storage and returned as part of the buy-back option which was exercised in Sept. 2011

Kinship Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the work that has been carried out in the last three years to establish and consolidate links with groups, charities and other non-governmental bodies which have specialist knowledge and skills in Kinship Care arrangements, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4611/11-15)

Mr Poots: Within the last three years, the Health and Social Care Trusts have indicated that they have either established or consolidated links with the groups, charities or other non-governmental bodies, which have a specialist knowledge and skills in kinship care, set out in the table below.

Trust	Groups, Charities and non-governmental bodies					
Belfast	Fostering Network	VOYPIC*	Forum for alcohol and substance abuse	School age mother's project	Family and Child Empowerment Service	Extern
South Eastern	Fostering Network	VOYPIC*				
Northern	Fostering Network	VOYPIC*				
Southern	Fostering Network	British Association for Adoption and Fostering	Family Care Society			
Western	Fostering Network	Kinship Care NI				

* Voices of Young People in Care

Kinship Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what partnership arrangements Social Services departments have entered into with other organisations in relation to Kinship Care in the last three years, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4613/11-15)

Mr Poots: Four of the five Health and Social Care Trusts have indicated that they have entered into partnership arrangements with other organisations in relation to kinship care over the last three years. Details of partner organisations are set out below. The Belfast Trust has indicated that it is in the process of developing a partnership proposal for the purpose of developing kinship services in its area.

HSC Trust	Established Partnerships
South Eastern	Fostering Network
Northern	Fostering Network
Southern	Fostering Network; Supporting Carers Project; Education and Library Board (Education Welfare); and British Association of Fostering and Adoption
Western	Fostering Network

Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland regarding North/South co-operation for the use of Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, for medical and health services including Paediatric Medicine.

(AQW 4648/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have had discussions with Minister Reilly in the Department of Health on a number of occasions about North South health issues including the use of Daisy Hill Hospital. The scope for co-operation between the two jurisdictions will be considered further in the context of the recommendations of HSC Review which is due to report at end November, as that was an important aspect of the Review's Terms of Reference. As I have already indicated, I will continue to support projects where there are opportunities to achieve mutual benefit for the populations within both jurisdictions and to share knowledge and experience to improve and enhance health and social care.

DHSSPS: Sports Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding his Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4740/11-15)

Mr Poots: Although my Department does not directly fund the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games and (iv) motor sports, the Public Health Agency provides funding to encourage active participation in rugby, soccer and Gaelic games. No funding is provided for the development and promotion of motor sports.

Details of funding provided in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

	Rugby	Soccer	Gaelic Games	Motor Sport	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
2010/11	525	2,951	980	-	4,456
2009/10	-	-	15,550	-	15,550
2008/09	1,000	1,950	-	-	2,950
Total	1,525	4,901	16,530	-	22,956

Outsourced Contracts and Services

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all outsourced contracts and services are being delivered by companies and individuals who are not directly employed by the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 4767/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4824/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my capacity as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and that of my predecessor, a total of 191 Public Appointments have been made since May 2007.

List of appointments detailed on Table 1 attached.

Table 1

NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS APPOINTED TO DHSSPS PUBLIC BODIES SINCE 8 MAY 2007

Name of Appointee	Organisation to which Appointed
Dr Richard Adams	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Dr Carol Ackah	Northern HSC Trust
Cllr Mrs Elizabeth (Beth) Adger	Patient & Client Council
Mr Roger Alexander	Southern HSC Trust
Ms Joy Allen	Belfast HSC Trust
Mr Paul David Archer	NI Ambulance Service Trust
Dr Ronald Atkinson	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency
Cllr Tim Attwood	Patient & Client Council
Mr Albert Samuel Baird	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency
Mrs Hazel Baird	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Cllr David Donaldson Barbour	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mr James Barbour	NI Fire & Rescue Service (2 appts)
Ms Alison Baxendale	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Mr Niall Birthistle	Western HSC Trust NI Fire & Rescue Service (temp appt)
Mr William Joseph Blake	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Mrs Deirdre Blakely	Southern HSC Trust
Mr Neil Bodger	NI Social Care Council
Mrs Roberta Brownlee	Southern HSC Trust
Ms Geraldine Campbell	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Cllr Michael Carr	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Dr Ian Wellington Carson	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Cllr John (Sean) Brendan Clarke	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mrs Maureen Clarke	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Dr William (Ian) Clements	Health & Social Care Board
Mr Alexander Hall Coleman	Business Service Organisation NI Fire & Rescue Service (temp appt)
Mr George Brian Compston	Patient & Client Council
Mr Hugh Connor*	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
Dr Paul Brian Coulter	Patient & Client Council
Mrs Stella Cummings	Western HSC Trust
Pro Carol Curran	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Mr Jim Currie	NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
Mr Paul Davidson	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Mr Peter Davison	South Eastern HSC Trust
Mrs Joan Doherty	Western HSC Trust
Ms Geraldine Donaghy	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Mr Leslie Drew	Belfast HSC Trust
Dr Maureen Edmondson	Patient & Client Council
Mrs Anna Eggert	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency

Name of Appointee	Organisation to which Appointed
Mrs Julie Erskine	NI Social Care Council (2 terms) Public Health Agency
Pro Eileen Evason	Belfast HSC Trust
Mrs Judith Eve	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency
Mrs Geraldine Fahy	Business Service Organisation
Dr Donal Flanagan	South Eastern HSC Trust
Mr Stanley Forsythe	Northern HSC Trust
Mr William Fulton Gillespie	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mr Robert Alan Gilmore	Health & Social Care Board
Mr Cecil William Lavery Graham	Eastern Health & Social Services Council
Mr Edwin Graham	Southern HSC Trust
Miss Francesca Mirianne Graham	South Eastern HSC Trust NI Fire & Rescue Service (temp appt)
Mrs Siubhan Grant	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mr Gerard Guckian	Western HSC Trust
Mr Alan David Hanna	NI Fire & Rescue Service (2 appts) Business Service Organisation
Pro Mary Bridget Hanratty	NI Ambulance Service (2 terms)
Dr Jeremy John Moore Harbison	Public Health Agency
Mrs Margaret Harte	Patient & Client Council
Cllr Tom Hartley	Belfast HSC Trust
Ald George (Arnold) Hatch	NI Fire & Rescue Service (2 terms)
Mrs Eva (Eleanor) Hayes	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Dr Michael Healy	Mental Health Commission
Mr Ian Henderson	NI Blood Transfusion Service
Mr Alan Henry	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Mr Stephen Herron	Mental Health Commission
Mr Glenn Robert Houston	NI Social Care Council
Mr Errol Victor Hutchinson	Patient & Client Council
Mr Gregory George Irwin	Business Service Organisation
Mr Charles Jenkins	Belfast HSC Trust
Mrs Harriett Elizabeth (Lilian) Jennett	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Cllr Mervyn Jones	Eastern Health & Social Services Council
Mr Alistair Joynes	Southern HSC Trust NIMDTA
Ms Miriam Karp	Public Health Agency NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Mr John Keanie	Patient & Client Council
Miss Elaine Kelly	Patient & Client Council
Dr Greg Kelly	NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
Mrs Hester Kelly	Southern HSC Trust
Dr Sheila Kelly	Patient & Client Council
Mrs Elizabeth Kerr	NI Social Care Council Health & Social Care Board
Mr Milton Kerr	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mrs Ruth Laird	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Mrs Catherine (Ruth) Lavery	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Mr Stephen James Leach	Health & Social Care Board NI Fire & Rescue Service (temp appt)
Mr Jim Lennon	NI Blood Transfusion Service (2 terms)
M Marina Lupari	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery

Name of Appointee	Organisation to which Appointed
Mrs Lorraine Lindsay	NI Blood Transfusion Service
Mr Charles Jonathon Mack	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mr Thomas Mahaffy	Public Health Agency
Mr Sean Edward Mahon	Business Service Organisation
Mrs Elizabeth Anne Mahood	Southern HSC Trust NI Fire & Rescue Service (temp member)
Ms Deepa Mann-kler	South Eastern HSC Trust
Mr Nigel Mansley	South Eastern HSC Trust
Dr John Marley	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency
Mr Bernard Mitchell	NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
Cllr Oliver Patrick Molloy	Patient & Client Council
Mr John Edward Mone	Health & Social Care Board
Ms Pamela Montgomery	Northern HSC Trust
Mr Jim Moore	Northern HSC Trust
Mr Deane Morris	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA)
Mr Ciaran Mulgrew	Western HSC Trust
Dr Connor Mulholland	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Cllr Patrick (Cathal) Mullaghan	Patient & Client Council
Dr Raymond Mullan	Southern HSC Trust
Dr May McCann	Patient & Client Council
Mr Robert McCann	Northern HSC Trust
Mrs Hilary Rose McCartan	Business Service Organisation
Mr Patrick Anthony McCartan	Belfast HSC Trust
Dr Brendan McCarthy	Western HSC Trust
Mr Allen McCartney	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Mrs Gillian McCaughey	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Mr Robin McClelland	Business Service Organisation
Mrs Sara (Sally) Jane Elizabeth McConnell-Campalani	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Prof Patrica McCoy	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Dr Melissa Theresa McCullough	Health & Social Care Board
Dr Val McGarrell	Belfast HSC Trust
Dr Maria McGinnity	Mental Health Commission
Mr Patrick McGowan	Western Health & Social Services Council
Dr Robert Henry (Harry) McGuigan	NI Medical & Dental Training Agency
Cllr Sean McGuigan	Patient & Client Council
Dr Joe McKee	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mr Brendan McKeever	NI Social Care Council Health & Social Care Board
Mr Jim McKeever	Western Health & Social Services Council
Mr Sean McKeever	NI Ambulance Service Trust
Mr Colm Cathal McKenna	South Eastern Trust
Prof Hugh McKenna	Patient & Client Council
Mr Noel McKenna	Mental Health Commission
Mr Norman McKinley	NI Ambulance Service Trust
Mrs Ann McMahan	NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
Mrs Florence McMahan	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Mrs Maire Theresa McMahan	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Ms Mary McMahan	Public Health Agency
Mr Charles Brain McMurray	Business Service Organisation

Name of Appointee	Organisation to which Appointed
Mrs Deirdre McNamee	NI Practice & Education Council for Nuysing & Midwifery
Cllr Stephen Nicholl	Public Health Agency
Mr Dermot O'Hara	South Eastern HSC Trust
Mr James O'Kane	Belfast HSC Trust
Mrs Sally O'Kane	Western HSC Trust
Mrs Winifred Anne (Una) O'Kane	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Mr Ronnie Orr	Public Health Agency
Miss Angela Paisley	NI Ambulance Service Trust
Mr Jim Perry	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Ald Paul Porter	Public Health Agency
Mr Mervyn Rankin	Northern HSC Trust
Mr Colin Reid	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Cllr Martin Reilly	Patient & Client Council
Ald Mrs Geraldine Ann Rice	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Mrs Frances Robson	Western Health & Social Services Council
Mrs Soibhan Rooney	Southern HSC Trust NI Blood Transfusion Service
Mrs Rena Shepherd	Patient & Client Council
Cllr James (Seamus) Ignatius Shields	NI Ambulance Service Trust
Mr Austin Bernard Douglas Smith	Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority
Cllr Mrs Marion Smyth	Patient & Client Council
Mrs Mary Janice Smyth	Patient & Client Council
Dr Trevor Martin Spratt	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Mr Alistair Steenson	NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
Mr Jim Robert Stewart	Northern HSC Trust
Mr Thomas Gerry Strong	Business Service Organisation
Mrs Barbara Stuart	Western HSC Trust
Mrs Eleanor Taggart	NI Social Care Council (2 terms)
Mrs Paula Tally	NI Fire & Rescue Service
Dr William (Robert) Thompson	Health & Social Care Board
Dr Vinod Tohani	NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery
Mr John Trethowan	South Eastern HSC Trust
Cllr Trevor James Wilson	Patient & Client Council
Pro Dorothy Whittington	Northern HSC Trust
Mrs Eileen Wright	Southern Health & Social Services Council
Ms Kyriakoulla Yiasouma	Patient & Client Council

*Appointed as Chair Designate – SBNI to be established 2012

DHSSPS: Capital Small Grants Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what capital small grants schemes are available from his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, for a group to create a garden, at a residential home, for the benefit of people with disabilities.

(AQW 4831/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department and associated arm's-length bodies does not currently operate any capital small grant schemes.

Diabetes: Regional Prescribing Policy Guidance

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Regional Prescribing Policy Guidance on the self-testing of glucose levels by people with Type 1 diabetes, to detail the guidance it offers on the number of tests a patient should carry out during a 24-hour period.

(AQW 4848/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the Health and Social Care Board that there is no Regional Prescribing Policy Guidance on the number of tests a patient should be carrying out during a 24-hour period on the self-testing of glucose levels by people with Type 1 diabetes.

However, all people with Type 1 diabetes should monitor their blood glucose on a regular basis and the frequency of their blood testing should be agreed, in consultation with their diabetes care team, based on sound clinical judgement and in line with the development of a personal diabetes management plan.

Kinship Care: Assessments

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average length of time it is taking to carry out a (i) short-term kinship care assessment; and (ii) full kinship care assessment in the current year.

(AQW 4855/11-15)

Mr Poots: On average, short-term kinship foster care assessments are carried out within 12 weeks and full kinship foster care assessments are completed within 6 months.

Kinship Carers on Foster Panels

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of kinship carers who have sat on fostering panels for the approval of kinship foster carers in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4858/11-15)

Mr Poots: All five Health and Social Care Trusts have indicated that there is currently no kinship foster care representation on fostering panels. It is possible that individuals, who are engaged in kinship care on an informal basis, could be represented on fostering panels in a lay/non-professional capacity.

Children's Care Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current leaving and after care services costs for children leaving (i) residential care; (ii) foster care; and (iii) kinship care arrangements.

(AQW 4860/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Kinship Carers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of kinship carers, approved or pending, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4861/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of kinship foster carers, who have been approved or for whom approval is pending in each Health and Social Care Trust area, is set out in the table below. Kinship foster care cases pending are those which have been approved by heads of service and are waiting to be approved by the Fostering Panel.

Kinship Foster Carers approved or pending		
HSC Trust	Approved	Pending
Northern	135	41
Southern	75	19
Belfast	74	104
South Eastern	54	71
Western	34	16

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

General Dental Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department will take to address the pressure on the budget for General Dental Services as a result of the increase in patients accessing Health Service dental services.

(AQW 4877/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department, in conjunction with the Health and Social Care Board, is considering the introduction of the following measures to help address the pressures on the General Dental Services budget:

- Removing those treatments that are more cosmetic in nature;

- Altering the conditions for providing certain treatments, for example limiting how often a scale and polish is provided to patients;
- Restricting the provision of orthodontic treatment on the basis of an internationally recognised measure of orthodontic treatment need; and
- Amending the conditions for dentists claiming practice allowance and ceasing payment of commitment allowances.

My Department have begun a process of engagement and consultation with key stakeholders and affected groups on these proposed changes. In addition, I propose to incorporate funding previously earmarked for the Quality Improvement Scheme into the General Dental Services budget.

GPs: Patient Registrations

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the change in the number of patients who were registered with a General Practitioner, under the Health Service arrangements, between October 2010 and October 2011, broken down by age group and locality.

(AQW 4879/11-15)

Mr Poots: The change in the number of patients who were registered with a General Practitioner, under the Health Service arrangements, between October 2010 and October 2011 is shown in table 1 below, broken down by age group and Local Government District, LGD.

Patients are assigned to an LGD based on the postcode of the practice at which they are registered. Patients are not necessarily resident in the LGD in which their practice is located.

Table 1: Change in the number of patients who were registered with a General Practitioner between October 2010 and October 2011.

LGD	Age Group							Total
	0-4	5-15	16-44	45-64	65-74	75-84	85+	
Antrim	69	31	-9	241	159	126	41	658
Ards	-47	44	-302	97	315	91	31	229
Armagh	72	8	209	126	138	43	43	639
Ballymena	36	-53	-7	202	154	68	96	496
Ballymoney	29	-38	1	98	71	23	-2	182
Banbridge	46	17	-46	335	85	77	77	591
Belfast	732	-329	-1746	1978	199	92	118	1044
Carrickfergus	-36	-47	-220	130	60	67	18	-28
Castlereagh	159	29	11	341	81	14	53	688
Coleraine	102	-60	-319	289	130	53	66	261
Cookstown	106	1	1	186	95	36	25	450
Craigavon	146	143	199	569	105	159	36	1357
Derry	59	-240	-528	621	267	144	55	378
Down	6	-106	-91	309	93	124	54	389
Dungannon	110	150	190	363	133	45	10	1001
Fermanagh	68	-23	-77	173	203	50	32	426
Larne	-10	9	-166	114	96	29	7	79
Limavady	82	8	-55	217	139	48	34	473
Lisburn	61	68	-47	475	265	157	49	1028
Magherafelt	31	-8	-13	246	72	-2	19	345
Moyle	23	3	-97	76	75	34	-10	104
Newry & Mourne	149	62	206	634	197	119	75	1442
Newtownabbey	63	-9	-87	267	129	14	64	441
North Down	199	11	-139	153	317	9	33	583
Omagh	1	-62	-68	196	143	54	46	310
Strabane	43	-108	-113	240	74	51	25	212
Northern Ireland	2299	-499	-3313	8676	3795	1725	1095	13778

Source: FPS, Information and Registration Unit, Business Services Organisation.

General Dental Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of the General Dental Services budget was spent on orthodontic treatments, in each of the last seven years; and what these figures represent as a percentage of the budget.

(AQW 4882/11-15)

Mr Poots: The net cost of orthodontic treatment paid for by the Health Service in each of the last seven years, and as a percentage of the overall expenditure on general dental services is shown in table 1 below.

Orthodontic treatment is defined as dental treatment for which a claim containing at least one item from Determination 1, Section VIII of the Statement of Dental Remuneration has been submitted for payment. The figures include orthodontic treatment provided by all types of dental practitioner. Orthodontic treatment may not necessarily have been provided by a specialist orthodontist.

Table 1: Net Costs (£m) of Health Service Orthodontic treatments by financial year and orthodontic expenditure as a percentage of total GDS expenditure

Year	Orthodontic Net	Orthodontic expenditure as a % of total GDS expenditure
2004/05	£6.47	11%
2005/06	£7.37	12%
2006/07	£7.56	12%
2007/08	£7.70	12%
2008/09	£8.22	11%
2009/10	£8.77	11%
2010/11	£9.85	11%

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit – HSC Business Services Organisation, Health and Social Care Board

1 Expenditure figures exclude patient contributions

Orthodontic Treatment

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients had orthodontic treatment paid for by the Health Service in each of the last seven years.

(AQW 4883/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of patients who received orthodontic treatment paid for by the Health Service in each of the last seven years is shown in table 1 below.

Orthodontic treatment is defined as dental treatment for which a claim containing at least one item from Determination I, Section VIII of the Statement of Dental Remuneration has been submitted for payment. The figures include orthodontic treatment provided by all types of dental practitioner, orthodontic treatment may not necessarily have been provided by a specialist orthodontist.

Figures include treatments paid for either in full or in part by the Health Service.

Table 1: The number of patients who received Health Service orthodontic treatment in each of the last seven years.

Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Number of Patients	25,997	27,112	26,488	25,035	26,070	25,850	30,785

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Bangor Hospital: Diabetes Clinic

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a new consultant has been appointed for Bangor Hospital's Diabetes Clinic; and when he expects the clinic to re-open.

(AQW 4884/11-15)

Mr Poots: Staff recruitment and the provision of outpatient clinics are operational matters for Health and Social Services Trusts. The South Eastern Trust has advised that it is unable at this point in time to confirm the date of resumption of the weekly diabetic clinic in Bangor Community Hospital. A new Consultant Physician has been appointed to the Diabetes Team but will not take up post before May 2012.

Flu Jabs

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Health Service states that the best time to have a flu jab is in the autumn, to detail (i) his Department's deadline for administering the flu jab to all at-risk groups; and (ii) if the deadline has passed, what action his Department is taking to ensure that all at-risk groups receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

(AQW 4914/11-15)

Mr Poots: I launched the annual seasonal flu vaccination programme on 30 September, as soon as adequate supplies of vaccine were available in Northern Ireland, and urged all eligible 'at risk' individuals to take up the offer of vaccination at their earliest opportunity. There is no set deadline for administering the flu vaccine, although GPs and Trusts work hard to vaccinate those eligible as soon as possible, before flu viruses are widely circulating in the community. The programme runs between October and March with the vast majority of vaccinations completed by December.

As of 24 November GP consultation rates for combined 'flu/Flu-Like Illness stood at 19.9/100,000 population. Rates are similar to the same weeks last year and remain well below the Northern Ireland threshold (70/100,000 pop).

This year the Public Health Agency launched a multimedia campaign to run between October and early December aimed at increasing uptake rates among 'at risk' individuals. I am pleased to note that by the end of October over 268,000 'at risk' individuals had been vaccinated and PHA reported a 25% increase (47,500 doses) in vaccine uptake from the same time last year.

Oral Health

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on the delivery of a strategy which utilises family practitioner service dentists to address the oral health needs of the population.

(AQW 4924/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department produced the Primary Dental Care Strategy in November 2006 and the Oral Health Strategy in June 2007. My Department is engaged with the British Dental Association on the development of new contracts for primary dental care practitioners that will meet the objectives set out in the Primary Dental Care Strategy and improve the oral health of the Northern Ireland population and reduce the inequalities in oral health within our society.

My Department has also introduced oral health improvement programmes involving general dental practitioners such as fissure sealant schemes and enhanced capitation and continuing care payments for patients living in the most deprived wards. We have also provided support for a large research trial based in general dental practices to investigate the efficacy of using fluoride varnish in young children to improve the oral health of our population.

Kinship Carers: Assessment

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many assessments of kinship carers, who are subject to Residence Order proceedings, have been carried out in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4929/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information relating to the assessments of kinship carers and complaints made by children in formal kinship care arrangements to Health and Social Care Trusts, are not available centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

There were no complaints to my Department from children in formal kinship care arrangements during the last three years.

Kinship Care: Funding

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of funding allocated to provide services to children in kinship care arrangements in order to meet the requirements of the Munby judgement, in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4932/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts are required to deliver all their legislative responsibilities from within their overall financial envelope and in that context, specific funding has not been allocated for the particular purpose of meeting the requirements of to enforce the Munby judgement.

Notwithstanding this, all Health and Social Care Trusts are complying with the requirements of the Munby judgement.

Kinship Care: Adoption

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been adopted by their kinship carers in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4933/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures are not available in the format requested. However, Table 1 below details the numbers of looked after children adopted from care by foster carers in each of the last three years for which data are available, broken down by Health and Social Care Trusts.

Table 1

Looked After Children Adopted by Foster Carers			
HSC Trust	2009/10	2007/08	2005/06
Belfast	8	-	-
Northern	9	9	12
South Eastern	-	-	-
Southern	10	11	-
Western	-	11	7
Total	34	39	26

Notes: Years detailed cover the period from 1 April to 31 March; Source of data are Community Information Return AD1, which has been biennial since 2004; 2005/06 data have been collated from legacy HSS Trusts returns; '-' cells have been suppressed to avoid personal disclosure.

Social Care Payments

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has considered introducing a cap on lifetime social care payments, given the perceived injustice on the part of people who have saved for their future care costs.

(AQW 4935/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am aware that the Department of Health in England is currently considering a range of possible amendments to the funding of social care in England, including capping lifetime contributions towards the cost of social care.

As a first step of the process of reform in NI, I will publish a discussion document next spring on the direction and funding of social care here. This will raise awareness on how the current system of support is funded, including seeking views on what is a fair and sustainable balance between contributions from government, service users and carers.

Pharmacies: Funding

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to help pharmacies when the withdrawal of funding means they cannot pay their bills.

(AQW 4956/11-15)

Mr Poots: New community pharmacy payment arrangements were introduced with effect from 1 April 2011 and are now subject to a judicial review challenge. Against this background it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on this matter in detail until the outcome of the hearing is known.

However, my Department recognises that it has an obligation to provide fair and reasonable remuneration to community pharmacies for the services they provide.

Minor Ailments Scheme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Minor Ailments Scheme was withdrawn and what his Department intends to put in its place.

(AQW 4957/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Minor Ailments Scheme has not been withdrawn and is still available through the Community Pharmacy network. Changes were introduced from 1 November 2010 to remove conditions such as coughs, colds and sore throats which will normally get better in a few days without treatment from the scheme. If symptoms persist, patients can visit their GP who may prescribe medication or they can simply purchase a treatment over the counter.

The level of payments that pharmacists receive for undertaking consultations with patients has not changed and the overall level of funding for the Scheme has not been reduced.

Kinship Care: Complaints by Children

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of complaints made by children in formal kinship care arrangements to (i) each Health and Social Care Trust; or (ii) his Department, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5007/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information relating to the assessments of kinship carers and complaints made by children in formal kinship care arrangements to Health and Social Care Trusts, are not available centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

There were no complaints to my Department from children in formal kinship care arrangements during the last three years.

Prisoners: Medical Needs

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether all the medical needs of prisoners at Maghaberry prison are being met, including the provision of all required medication and health visits. **(AQW 5008/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provides healthcare services at HMP Maghaberry. Since assuming responsibility for this service, the Trust has improved the services delivered in all prison establishments. It has audited its current service provision against national standards for the delivery of prison healthcare, and benchmarked the results against similar prison establishments in GB.

The Trust is currently engaged with the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency to carry out a needs assessment which will identify healthcare needs across all three prison sites and facilitate future service planning and delivery. My Department, the HSC Board and South Eastern HSC Trust are committed to working with the NI Prison Service to ensure the continued successful provision of prison healthcare services across all establishments.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority is funded. **(AQW 5025/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The principal source of funding for the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is grant-in-aid paid by my Department. RQIA also generates income through fees and recharged costs. A summary of income, revenue and capital expenditure, and their financing, is contained in RQIA's Annual Report and Accounts. The most recent edition (2010-2011) is available at:

http://www.rqia.org.uk/cms_resources/RQIA%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%20April%202011.pdf

Midwives

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of midwives working in each Health and Social Care Trust who are under the age of 45. [R] **(AQW 5032/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Number of Midwives employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care aged under 45 by Trust at September 2011

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	142	105.84
Northern	108	85.92
South Eastern	109	86.24
Southern	116	88.99
Western	89	73.55

Source: Human Resources Management System

Note: 1 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.

Meals on Wheels

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who used the Meals on Wheels service in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. **(AQW 5095/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Information on the number of persons receiving a Meals on Wheels service in each HSC Trust at 31 March for each of the last three years is detailed in the table.

Table 1: Persons receiving a Meals on Wheels Service at 31 March 2009-2011 1,2,3

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	1,416	1,433	1,358

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Northern	1,116	1,075	948
South Eastern	760	592	573
Southern	785	569	340
Western	1,094	1,009	1,026
Northern Ireland	5,171	4,678	4,245

Source: Community Information KMW2 Return

- Information includes services provided by private contractors.
- Figures include information on the provision of frozen meals.
- Figures at 31 March 2011 are provisional and due to be published in 'Adult Community Statistics for Northern Ireland 2010-2011' in December 2011.

Kinship Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children in kinship care who are subject to (i) Care Orders; (ii) Residence Orders; and (iii) in other kinship care arrangements, are on the Child Protection Register; and how many have been placed on the Child Protection Register in the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. **(AQW 5152/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

The nearest available figures to those requested, relate to the legal status of children on the child protection register as at 30 September 2011. These are detailed in Table 1 below for your information.

Table 1 Children on the Child Protection Register by Legal Status (30 September 2011)

HSC Trust	Emergency Protection Order (Article 63 & 64)	Accommodated (Article 21)	Interim Care Order (Article 57)	Care Order (Article 50 or 59)	Interim Supervision Order (Article 57)	Other	None	Total
Belfast	0	39	34	6	-	-	465	549
Northern	0	21	10	-	0	0	360	393
South Eastern	-	20	5	-	0	-	560	590
Southern	-	17	13	-	-	-	353	391
Western	-	11	15	-	0	-	262	297
Northern Ireland	5	108	77	12	8	10	2,000	2,220

Source: Children Order Return CPR4; '-' Some cell counts have been suppressed to prevent personal disclosure. Please note that these figures are provisional.

Kinship Carers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many kinship foster carers, approved or pending, are listed within each Health and Social Care Trust area. **(AQW 5164/11-15)**

Mr Poots: My reply to AQW 4861/11-15 refers.

Mental Health and Mental Capacity Legislation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans to introduce legislation on mental health and mental capacity. **(AQO 883/11-15)**

Mr Poots: In April 2011, the Executive agreed that my Department could proceed to draft the Mental Capacity (Health, Welfare and Finance) Bill which will apply to civil society. It is anticipated that a draft civil-only Bill could be introduced into the Assembly in Autumn 2012. The application of the principles and approaches in this Bill to those subject to the criminal justice system is currently being considered by the Department of Justice. The option still remains open to merge the civil and criminal justice elements into one Bill, should timings allow. This would be the preferred approach of both Departments and, I understand, of both Committees; but I will want to discuss and agree any subsequent alteration to the legislative timetable with Minister Ford.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department's sexual health strategy has resulted in any decrease in the number of young people with sexually transmitted infections.

(AQO 887/11-15)

Mr Poots: Public health policy that seeks to influence and change population health behaviours generally takes some time to make a measurable impact. This is the case with the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy which was published in December 2008.

However, the latest data show a slight decrease in new episodes of sexually transmitted infections in young people (under 25 years), from 2633 in 2008 to 2502 in 2010. These numbers represent combined figures for new diagnoses of HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes and genital warts. Individual patients may contribute to more than one diagnosis.

The regional Sexual Health Improvement Network is continuing to drive forward action in support of the Strategy. A mid-term review to assess progress against the Strategy's objectives, one of which is to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections, will be carried out next year.

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why his Department does not keep records on the extent of Kinship Care.

(AQO 886/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are essentially two types of kinship care, either formal kinship care or informal kinship care. In the case of formal kinship care, this involves children being placed in care with either family or friends, with the placement being assessed by social services staff in Health and Social Care Trusts and in accordance with what the law requires. Informal kinship care is the care of children by family in circumstances where a child is unable, for whatever reason, to live with his or her birth parent or parents.

In the main, unless child protection issues are referred to them, children's social services have no role in approving the care of these children because the extended family of the child has chosen not to involve the State in the care of their kin. I should emphasise that this is their prerogative. They are not required to involve the State and in many cases they choose not to.

At 31 March 2011, there were 717 children in kinship foster care in Northern Ireland, 336 boys and 381 girls. These formal arrangements require the approval of social services and records are kept in relation to assessments, reviews and social work visits.

However, if children are being looked after through an informal kinship care arrangement, social services will generally not have any involvement with them and they will not therefore appear in official statistics.

Healthcare Staff: Armed Forces

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the action he is taking to support health care staff who serve in, or give time to assist, the armed forces.

(AQO 892/11-15)

Mr Poots: Whilst my Department is not prescriptive on the granting of special leave or other forms of assistance to health and social care staff engaged in support for the armed forces, health service employers are encouraged to develop flexible working arrangements, within the confines of maintaining a round the clock service. Staff are normally granted one week's special leave with pay for attendance at reserve forces training and for a second week as special leave without pay or as part of the normal annual leave entitlement. Staff called up for service, such as in Afghanistan, would normally be granted unpaid leave with their employment rights fully protected.

Breastfeeding

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to introduce legislation on breastfeeding.

(AQO 893/11-15)

Mr Poots: Through consultation on the new Breastfeeding Strategy in the New Year, my Department will be seeking the views of all stakeholders and the public on the introduction of legislation to support breastfeeding in public places. The outcome of this consultation will help inform policy direction in this area.

Hospitals: Strike Action

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that the anticipated strike action on 30 November 2011 will have on access to outpatient and inpatient treatment.

(AQO 894/11-15)

Mr Poots: The key issue for me in all of this is about patient safety - that is of paramount importance. A set protocols has been agreed between HSC employers which will allow HSC organisations to work with local trade union representatives to agree the levels of cover necessary on the day. If everyone adheres to the protocols then clinically critical and emergency services and

infrastructure will be maintained on the day. Regrettably however there will be an impact on services particularly in relation to non critical clinical activity. This means that patients and clients waiting to be seen for some treatments and care will experience delays. This is something which I find regrettable.

Bowel Cancer

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to tackle bowel cancer. (AQO 895/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Bowel Cancer Screening Programme, which was launched in April 2010, aims to reduce the number of deaths from bowel cancer. The programme is being rolled out on a phased basis and will be fully implemented across Northern Ireland from January 2012, and in the first instance screening is being offered to men and women aged between 60 and 69. The programme will be extended to include people up to the age of 71 from April 2012.

The draft Programme for Government 2011-15 currently out for public consultation, includes a commitment to extend the age range for bowel cancer screening up to age 74 across all Trust areas from 2014/15.

Public Health Strategies aimed at reducing the levels of obesity and improving diet and lifestyle will also help reduce levels of bowel cancer.

Recent investment in cancer treatment will further improve outcomes for those with bowel cancer.

Eating Disorders: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young adults within the Western Health and Social Care Trust area have eating disorders, and what support is provided for them. (AQO 896/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are 22 young adults, aged between 18 and 25, currently known to the Eating Disorders Service in the Western Trust area.

Psychological interventions include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Motivational enhancement work, Family intervention work, Narrative Therapy work and Body Image Work. The Trust is also in the process of establishing a family therapy work-shop. The service model for people with Eating Disorders also includes psycho-educational work and consultation, dietetic advice and support from a specialist Eating Disorders dietician, review and in-reach to local in-patient wards. Dr Ken Yeow, the regional Eating Disorders consultant, also provides monthly out-reach clinics where complex cases can be reviewed.

Prescription Drugs: Addiction

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the level of addiction to prescription drugs. (AQO 897/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department is aware of the growing concern about the misuse of "prescription drugs". Prevalence rates on the use of (though not misuse of) sedatives and tranquilisers and anti-depressants in Northern Ireland were published in the 2010/11 Drug Prevalence Survey. 8% of those who responded stated they had used sedatives and tranquilisers in the last month, 10% had used anti-depressants, and 4% had used other opiates.

The Drug Misuse Database holds information on people presenting to treatment services with problem drug misuse, including drugs such as benzodiazepines, codeine and paracetamol that are prescribed medication. According to the most recent figures benzodiazepines were the second most commonly reported main drug of misuse reported by 19% of individuals, and codeine & paracetamol were reported as the main drug of misuse by 2%.

The misuse of prescription drugs has been raised as an emerging issue during the development of the revised strategy to address the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse in Northern Ireland, and we need to give more consideration as to how this can be taken forward.

Department of Justice

Perverting the Course of Justice: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1825/11-15, when the figures from 2006 onwards will be available. (AQW 4008/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Provisional data on convictions is now available for 2007 and 2008. This is based on an alternative source and is not comparable to previous data.

The table below gives the number convicted for perverting the course of justice under Common Law in 2007 & 2008.

Number of people convicted of perverting the course of justice – number convicted, 2007-2008

Year	2007	2008
Convictions	9	10

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The data are provisional as a verification exercise is currently underway.

Prisons: Security Alerts

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last five years (i) the number of security alerts in each prison; and (ii) the date each alert occurred.

(AQW 4352/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The information recorded in the table below relates to the number of security alerts raised over the last five years (2006 – 2010).
- (ii) Given the volume of incidents involved (4411) information relating to the actual date each alert occurred could only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public purse.
- (iii) Some alerts fall into a number of different categories, so there may be an element of double or more counting of a single incident.

	Maghaberry					Magilligan					HydebankWood				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Abscond	0	1	0	1	0	27	24	20	7	11	0	0	2	0	0
Alarm - Discipline	68	59	59	54	103	19	19	11	13	29	2	1	1	0	25
Arson	3	1	2	1	1	8	3	0	4	1	3	4	2	0	0
Assault - Inmate on Inmate	47	32	23	24	34	24	16	12	19	40	42	39	47	59	64
Assault Inmate on Staff	31	29	14	18	23	10	3	3	8	4	10	9	11	13	9
Attempted Assault on Inmate	0	4	4	0	4	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	2	3	11
Attempted Assault on Staff	0	24	56	36	41	5	0	2	3	2	0	14	18	21	8
Attempted Escape	1	0	2	4	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Cell Wreck	5	6	2	7	38	8	2	2	7	5	9	5	14	11	20
Control & Restraint	44	66	47	75	138	4	5	1	3	2	74	70	59	61	34
Disruption/Incitement	31	25	38	44	27	18	8	23	18	18	8	6	1	10	16
Drugs	23	30	50	51	75	193	121	173	122	94	3	11	3	4	5
Escape	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Explosives	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fire	0	0	2	0	1	0	4	5	2	4	0	0	2	0	2
Handcuffs Applied	0	6	1	10	22	0	0	0	0	1	0	15	7	12	1
Home Leave	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0
Hostage	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inmate Violence	13	18	11	9	8	0	11	2	10	8	18	19	7	12	6

	Maghaberry					Magilligan					HydebankWood				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Intimidation	16	17	17	12	17	6	3	5	6	2	2	0	0	2	0
Loss - Keys	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Loss - Tools	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mobile Phones	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	34	0	0	0	0	0
Refusal to Lock	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0
Staff Subversion	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Trafficking	22	28	35	76	83	13	21	13	13	3	1	3	0	0	1
Weapons	0	0	3	3	4	3	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
Totals	309	346	366	429	624	340	241	275	236	276	179	200	176	211	203

Magilligan Prison

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3462/11-15, for a breakdown of the £3.77m expenditure on Magilligan Prison.

(AQW 4483/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table A below provides a breakdown to date of the total expenditure of £3,772,595 on the preparation and development of the new prison at Magilligan:

Table A

Cost	Detail
£ 264,919	Preparation of the outline Business Case
£2,783,048	Design work
£ 418,707	Programme Management
£ 67,087	Procurement
£ 207,457	Staffing Costs
£ 5,940	Gateway Review
£ 25,437	Advertising, Stationary, Travel and Departmental costs

Devidas Paliutus

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the status of Devidas Paliutus; and when he is likely to be brought before a court in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 4497/11-15)

Mr Ford: An update on the status of Mr Paliutus and when he is likely to be brought before a court in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operation independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

DOJ: Funding

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail any funding allocated by his Department to each (i) non-departmental public body; and (ii) voluntary body in each of the last three years; and the purpose for which each allocation was made.

(AQW 4517/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into existence on 12th April 2010. Details of funding before that date are a matter for the previous department.

Funding for non departmental and voluntary bodies is set out in the Departments resource accounts (page 87). The accounts are on the Departments web site available at the following link

http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/publications/publication-categories/pubs-departmental-business/department_of_justice_resource_accounts_2010-11.htm

For convenience the figures are set out in the table below.

For non departmental public bodies the funding shown covers cash 'Grant in Aid' expenditure which covers general running costs and capital costs for each body.

Voluntary Bodies funding purposes are as follows:

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust – Funding is given to support members of the RUC/PSNI with assessment, treatment and training, prior to and following the cessation of their service.

RUC George Cross Widows Association – Funding is given to support and improve the quality of life for RUC widows and their families.

Victim Support NI – Grant in Aid.

NIACRO – Grant in Aid.

NSPCC – Funding is given for the delivery of the Young Witness Service and the contribution to the development of policy.

Extern – Grant in Aid.

Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives – Funding is given to supervise and support activities in Northern Ireland in relation to community based restorative justice schemes.

	2010-11 £000				2009-10 £000 Restated	
	Core Department		Consolidated		Core Department	Consolidated
	Estimate	Outturn	Estimate	Outturn		Outturn
Non-departmental public bodies:						
Police Service of Northern Ireland	1,030,078	986,892	1,030,078	986,892	927,283	927,283
Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland	8,832	8,468	8,832	8,468	9,009	9,009
Northern Ireland Policing Board	8,982	8,709	8,982	8,709	7,855	7,855
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	20,850	19,660	20,850	19,660	19,045	19,045
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	1,435	1,435	1,435	1,435	1,475	1,475
Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission	-	-	102,716	99,513	-	103,000
Northern Ireland Police Fund	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,770	1,770
RUC George Cross Foundation	162	133	162	133	158	158
Voluntary bodies:						
Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust	3,457	3,107	3,457	3,107	3,046	3,046
Widows Association	40	40	40	40	40	40
Victim Support	2,213	2,213	2,213	2,213	2,154	2,154
NIACRO	509	509	509	509	496	496
NSPCC	384	384	384	384	373	373
Extern	352	352	352	352	343	343
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	50	50	50	50	47	47
Northern Ireland Alternatives	50	50	50	50	52	52

European Court of Human Rights

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of Lord Judge's remarks that the courts have tended to interpret the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights too closely, and that many of its rulings relate only to specific cases and do not set wider legal precedents.

(AQW 4593/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am aware of the remarks made by Lord Judge, the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, to the Joint Committee on Human Rights to which the question refers.

As the Lord Chief Justice's evidence to the Committee notes, it is likely that the Supreme Court will ultimately determine whether the courts have correctly interpreted the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

I do not intend to comment on the specific remarks made by the Lord Chief Justice as to do so would not be consistent with my duty to uphold judicial independence.

Office of the Police Ombudsman: Employment Tribunals

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Justice how much compensation the Office of the Police Ombudsman has paid to staff as a result of employment tribunals in the last four years; and what has been the cost to the Office in legal fees for these tribunals. **(AQW 4644/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The Office of the Police Ombudsman has advised me that no compensation has been paid to staff as a result of employment tribunals in the last four years. The legal cost associated with employment tribunals in this time is £39,263.

Sectarian Crime: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for sectarian crime in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 4673/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not possible to provide conviction data on sectarian crime as conviction datasets do not distinguish sectarian offences.

Prisoners: Private Transport

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, with the exception of Robert Black, on how many occasions has any method of private transport been hired or chartered for prisoners and paid for by the National Offender Management Service, a Government Department, or an arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 4674/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Minister of Justice, I can only provide information in relation to the Department of Justice.

Northern Ireland Prison Service records are only available from 2007 and show that, with the exception of Robert Black, no prisoners have been transported using private, hired or chartered transport and paid for by the National Offender Management Service or Department of Justice.

The transportation of prisoners by the PSNI is a matter for the Chief Constable who is operationally independent from Government and accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. NIPS does not collate records of prisoners who have been transported using private, hired or chartered transport by the PSNI.

Prison Review Team

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the Prison Review Team, to detail (i) the amount paid to each member; (ii) the hours worked by each member; and (iii) the expenses claims of each member, to date.

(AQW 4675/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is provided in the following table. It details the total amount paid to date, to each member of the Prison Review Team, in respect of both their fees and travel expenses and the days worked based on a 7hour 25 minute day.

Prison Review Team - Costs - June 2010 to October 2011			
	Fees	Days worked	Expenses¹
Anne Owers	£75,307.65	1251/2	£999.11
Phil Wheatley	£40,500.00	671/2	£1,175.87
Paul Leighton	£32,000.00	64	£2,565.26
Clodach McGrory	£36,062.50	691/2	£547.70
Fergus McNeill	£44,182.50	62	£773.16
Totals	228,052.65	388.5	6,061.10

Gerry McGeough: Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) for an update on how much Legal Aid has been paid in relation to the case of Gerry McGeough who was convicted of attempted murder, and other related offences, broken down by (a) solicitor costs; and (b) counsel costs; and (ii) to detail the cost, or an estimate, of the Legal Aid paid to date in relation to Gerry McGeough's (a) judicial review to seek a Royal Prerogative of Mercy from Her Majesty the Queen in relation to these offences; and (b) appeal against his conviction for attempted murder.

(AQW 4677/11-15)

Mr Ford: Gerry McGeough was granted criminal legal aid for legal representation in the Magistrates' Court, the Crown Court and for High Court bail applications.

All claims have been received and paid for representation in the Magistrates' Court. The total amount paid was £9,396.45 (inc VAT) for the solicitor's fees and £2,002.49 (inc VAT) for counsel's fees.

Fees have also been paid to the solicitor for three High Court bail applications amounting to £2,574.82 (inc VAT).

In addition, claims received to date in respect of the solicitor's fees under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act have totalled £2,188.48 (inc VAT and disbursements).

As this case was certified as a Very High Cost case, the determination of the Crown Court fees is a matter for the Taxing Master. I understand that claims have been submitted and are currently with the Taxing Master for assessment. A fee of £5,000 has issued in respect of an interim payment for a disbursement incurred by the solicitor.

To date, the legal aid paid in relation to Gerry McGeough's application for judicial review to seek the exercise of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy from Her Majesty the Queen in relation to these offences is £2,620 (inc VAT and disbursements). This was paid as an interim payment.

Legal aid funding for the appeal against conviction for attempted murder will also be subject to assessment by the Taxing Master. No estimate of the cost of the appeal can be provided at this time.

Prison Review Team

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he, or his officials, are in receipt of any recommendations, suggestions or conclusions from the Prison Review Team, other than what is contained in the published report.
(AQW 4687/11-15)

Mr Ford: No.

Prison Service: Symbol and Name

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to his statement in the Assembly on 14 November 2011, to detail from where the idea that symbols and names should feature in any 'end to end' review of the Prison Service came; and how and when such ideas were explored and addressed by his Department.
(AQW 4688/11-15)

Mr Ford: Symbols and names have been subject to discussion between NIPS management and staff associations on a number of occasions prior to the devolution of Justice functions. The issue featured in discussions of the NIPS Uniform Committee and the Whitley Council, although consideration of the issue was suspended pending the outcome of the review of prisons.

As I have made clear, this is one of a range of issues which I would expect to be considered in the context of any end to end review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Prison Service: Symbol and Name

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what plans exist, or existed, to end (i) prisons being called "Her Majesty's prisons"; and (ii) the crown being part of the symbol of the Prison Service.
(AQW 4689/11-15)

Mr Ford: There neither are, nor have there been any plans agreed for the removal of the words "Her Majesty's Prisons" or the symbol of the crown from prisons in Northern Ireland.

However symbols and names have been subject to discussion between NIPS management and staff associations on a number of occasions prior to the devolution of Justice functions.

As I have made clear, this is one of a range of issues which I would expect to be considered in the context of any end to end review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Prison Service: Symbol and Name

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to publish all documents held by his Department in relation to any plans to end (i) prisons being called "Her Majesty's prisons"; and (ii) the crown being part of the symbol of the Prison Service.
(AQW 4690/11-15)

Mr Ford: Publication of the documents referred to is already being considered in response to a Freedom of Information request by the Member.

Historical Enquiries

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost, to date, of any ongoing Historical Enquiries.
(AQW 4704/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total costs incurred by the Historical Enquiries Team and the Office of the Police Ombudsman regarding Historical Enquiries up to 31 March 2011 are below.

Historical Enquiries Team	£34m
Office of the Police Ombudsman	£4.345m

Benefits Appeals Tribunals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that more benefits appeals tribunals are making use of case law and that all appeal panels have a legally qualified member, whether he is prepared to make legal aid available to appellants to ensure that there is appropriate and balanced representation in the interests of access to justice and human rights legislation.

(AQW 4729/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Access to Justice Review, which issued its final report in September this year, examined a number of issues concerning representation at tribunals. I have issued this report for public consultation and would welcome views on the report's recommendations in this area.

Bangor Police Station; Donaghadee Police Station and Holywood Police Station: Revenue Expenditure

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail, for the last available year, the total current revenue expenditure at (i) Bangor Police Station; (ii) Donaghadee Police Station; and (iii) Holywood Police Station.

(AQW 4769/11-15)

Mr Ford: The allocation of funding is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Colin Duffy: Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much legal aid Colin Duffy has received to date for his current murder trial and his criminal damage case at Maghaberry Prison, broken down by costs for his (i) solicitor; (ii) junior counsel; and (iii) senior counsel; and what the estimated legal aid cost will be at the conclusion of these proceedings.

(AQW 4803/11-15)

Mr Ford: To date, the total amount paid in criminal legal aid fees in respect of the murder trial amounts to £20,775.88 (inc. VAT of £3,272.57). However, as the case is still ongoing a number of claims from both solicitor and counsel have yet to be made and accordingly the final cost will be significantly higher.

The fees paid to date are as follows:

Solicitor's Fees	Junior Counsel	Senior Counsel
£16,881.99 (inc. VAT of £2,623.59)	£1,411.62 (inc. VAT of £235.27)	£2,482.27 (inc. VAT of £413.71)

This case has been certified as a Very High Cost Case and any claims will be assessed by the Taxing Master. It is therefore not possible to estimate the final cost with any accuracy at this time.

Regarding the charge of criminal damage, a legal aid certificate was granted for a solicitor only to represent the defendant at the Magistrates' Court. The case is listed for contest on the 12 December – it is not possible to estimate the final cost of these proceedings at this stage.

Foreign National Defendants: Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4006/11-15, why district judges are granting legal aid to foreign national defendants on the basis of language barriers or difficulties when an interpreter is provided to defendants by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service if one is required.

(AQW 4804/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is responsible for providing interpreters for foreign national defendants with language difficulties to cover court appearances before the criminal courts. The PSNI provides interpreters during police interviews. In addition to this, interpreters are also required in order to allow the defence team to take instructions from clients and to interview potential witnesses whose first language may not be English.

The granting of criminal legal aid by a District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) is dependent on a defendant passing a 'means test' (that his or her means are insufficient to pay for their own defence) and a 'merits test' (that it is in the interests of justice that he or she should have free legal aid). Where a defendant with language difficulties passes these tests and is granted legal aid, the costs associated with providing interpreters to allow the defence team to prepare a defendant's defence, (other than during court appearances or police interviews), is met out of the legal aid fund.

As stated in my answer to AQW 4006/11-15, the mere fact that a person has language difficulties, whether by reason of nationality or disability, is not normally the determining factor in the decision whether or not to grant legal aid.

DOJ: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to list the public appointments that he has made since June 2010. (AQW 4827/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have made a total of 29 public appointments since June 2010. In addition I have made 8 re-appointments since June 2010. Details are listed in the attached table.

Name of Body	Name of Appointee	Date of Appointment	Date of Re-appointment
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	Dr M Maguire	Prior to June 2010	01/09/11
Northern Ireland Policing Board	Mr S B Rea	Prior to June 2010	24/05/11
	Mr G Ó hEára	Prior to June 2010	24/05/11
	Ms A M Connolly	24/05/11	
	Mr R J Feeney	24/05/11	
	Mr J S McDonnell	24/05/11	
	Mrs J T O'Hagan	24/05/11	
	Mr B M Rowntree	24/05/11	
	Mr M T Wardlow	24/05/11	
Northern Ireland Law Commission	Ms D Watters	24/05/11	
	Professor S Doran	Prior to June 2010	10/03/11
	Mr R Hunniford	Prior to June 2010	10/03/11
	Mr N Faris	Prior to June 2010	10/03/11
Independent Monitoring Board - Maghaberry Prison	Dr V Iyer	Prior to June 2010	01/09/11
	Mr P R Lees	01/07/10	
	Mr A Khamassi	01/07/10	
	Mr A Hussain	01/07/10	
	Ms A M McCauley	01/07/10	
	Mrs S E Cunningham	01/07/10	
	Mrs V C McConnell	01/07/10	
Independent Monitoring Board - Magilligan Prison	Mr A Abolarin	01/07/10	
	Mr J P Devlin	01/07/10	
	Mr F B Doherty	01/07/10	
	Ms J Burke	01/07/10	
	Mrs B McCollum	01/07/10	
	Mr P E McAteer	01/07/10	
Independent Monitoring Board - Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre & Prison	Mr P Martin	01/07/10	
	Mr B Lewis	01/07/10	
	Ms C Allen	01/07/10	
	Mrs L Williamson	01/07/10	
	Mrs J O'Loan	01/07/10	
	Mr F M Walsh	01/07/10	
	Miss C V Stoll	01/07/10	
	Mr M J Love	01/07/10	
	Mrs N Francis	01/07/10	
Mr J Irvine	01/07/10		
Judicial Appointments Ombudsman	Mr K Singh	Prior to June 2010	25/09/11

Speeding: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice how many convictions for driving at excess speed have been dealt with in court instead of by a Fixed Penalty Notice in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 4891/11-15)

Mr Ford: Speeding offences may be prosecuted under Article 7(9) and Article 43 of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and Article 19(a) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for speeding offences by court division 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	467	621	454
Ards	354	464	367
Armagh and South Down	555	686	733
Belfast	322	617	346
Craigavon and Lisburn	158	159	155
Fermanagh and Tyrone	571	711	414
Londonderry	283	322	378
Total	2,710	3,580	2,847

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Early Releases of Brendan Lillis and Abdelbaset al-Megrahi

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he discussed any security issues that arose from the early releases of Brendan Lillis and Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, on the grounds of their failing health, during his meeting with the Scottish Justice Minister.

(AQW 4918/11-15)

Mr Ford: This issue was not discussed during my meeting with the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice.

Parking Violations: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice how many convictions for parking violations, including the misuse of disabled parking bays, have been dealt with in court instead of by a Fixed Penalty Notice in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 5058/11-15)

Mr Ford: Parking offences may be prosecuted under Article 4, Article 19(1)(b), Article 19(3) and Article 59 of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, Article 30 and Article 50 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Article 12 and Article 14 of the On-Street Parking Order (Northern Ireland) 1997, Regulation 8 of the (Pelican) Pedestrian Crossings Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989, Regulation 9 of the "Zebra" Pedestrian Crossings Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1974, Regulation 9 of the Motorways Traffic Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1984, Article 20(4) of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, Section 51(1) of the Terrorism Act 2000, or Section 49(3) of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996.

The table overleaf gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for parking offences by court division 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	4	3	1
Ards	3	3	1
Armagh and South Down	0	0	1
Belfast	18	22	8
Craigavon and Lisburn	2	3	2
Fermanagh and Tyrone	4	0	1
Londonderry	0	2	0
Total	31	33	14

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to reform the Small Claims Court.

(AQW 5072/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the Small Claims Court in Northern Ireland provides an affordable and relatively informal means of resolving consumer disputes and other civil claims.

As I said in response to AQW1710/11-15, the Small Claims Court has been subject to a number of important reforms over recent years.

Small Claims Online allows claimants to make an application using the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service website and also allows the parties to track the progress of proceedings online.

In May of this year, following public consultation (Increasing the Jurisdictional Limit of the County Courts in Northern Ireland), the financial limit of the Small Claims Court was increased from £2,000 to £3,000.

The public consultation also sought views on the continued exclusion of certain types of claim from the Small Claims Court, namely personal injury cases and road traffic accidents. The County Court Rules Committee, which is responsible for these exclusions, is currently considering the responses to the public consultation exercise.

Department for Regional Development

Sewers and Pumping Stations: Strangford

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted sewers and pumping stations, with outstanding agreements with NI Water, in the Strangford constituency which are under the control of receivers or administrators. **(AQW 3649/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system which may be adopted at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This includes agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007.

It is the responsibility of the persons constructing the sewerage system to advise NIW when they consider it is completed to a satisfactory standard, to enable the system to be inspected and a Certificate of Completion to be issued with a view to future adoption.

NIW works closely with my Department's Road Service in taking forward the adoption of streets and sewers where a developer is no longer trading. NIW has not been advised of any developments within the Strangford Constituency which would sit under enforcement procedures within the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 legislation. NIW works with Roads Service Private Streets Section in the matter of developments which are in control of a receiver or administrator and would sit under the Department's Private Streets enforcement procedures, but does not have the specific details as to the total number of developments which are being taken forward under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 enforcement procedures.

Sewers: Strangford

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development which sewers in the Strangford constituency have been adopted in the last (i) twelve months; (ii) three years; and (iii) five years. **(AQW 3673/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the sewerage system within 14 developments in the Strangford Constituency has been adopted in the past three years as detailed in the table below. The information requested for the past five years is not readily available.

Year	Development Name
2008 (from October)	Lands at 115 Ballynahinch Road, Carryduff
	Teal Rocks, Newtownards
2009	Helensview Park, Newtownards
2010	Robbs Road / Ardnoe Avenue, Dundonald
	Whitecherry Hill/Lane, Killinchy
	Long Island Drive Phase 3, Cooks Brae, Kircubbin
	Westlands, Main Road, Portavogie
	Tullynakill Road, Ardmillan
	Bartley's Wood, Greyabbey

Year	Development Name
2011 (to date)	Manse Close, Carrowdore
	Saintfield Mill, Saintfield
	Watermeade Park, Avenue and Crescent, Greyabbey
	Upper Crescent, Comber
	Seaview Court, Portavogie

Grit Boxes: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the current locations of grit boxes in the North Down area. (AQW 4324/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: To date, my Department's Roads Service has provided 177 salt bins within the North Down area, at the following locations:

HOLYWOOD – 51 BINS	
Cultra Slip Road Belfast bound to Folk Museum	Old Quay Court No.4
East Link Street Light No 2	Kintyre Avenue at Street Light No.5
West Link Street Light No 8	Princess Gardens at Street Light No.15
Abbey Ring Street Light No 34	Princess Park opposite No.9
Abbey Ring Street Light No 12	Tor Grange at No.10 near Street Light
Abbots Wood near junction Demesne Road	Invergourie Road at Stathleven Park name plate
Strathearn Court at Street Light No. 1	Entrance to The Coaches, Brown's Brae
Cedar Grove opposite Street Light No.4	The Spires at Street Light No 3
The Green at Street Light No.1	Woodcroft Park outside No 3
Inver Park opposite Street Light No.4	Seafront Road junction with Circular Rd @ Street Light No.6
Demense Park at No.15 at wall	Station Road, Craigavad No.4
Demense Avenue at No.15	Creighton's Green Road before speed limit sign on bend
Elizabeth Road opposite Street Light No.3	Creighton's Green Road near No.15 on bend
Croft Park @ Street Light No 9	Creighton's Green Road near No.41 on right hand side at field gate
Ardmore Road at Street Light No.6	Carlston Avenue No.1/Whinney Hill
Ardmore Heights opposite No.9 at Street Light No.6	Old Seahill Road/Seahill Drive at white wall
Ardmore Road No.39 (past No. 39) near radius	Martello Park No.10
Glenview Road No.7	Martello Park No 28
Glenview Avenue opposite Street Light No.3	Rhanbuoy Park Street Light No 10
Ardmore Park at No.3	Larch Hill No.1 (half way up hill)
Brook Street at Clinic	Larch Hill Ave No.5 junction with Larch Hill Drive
Windsor Avenue at No.12	Ballygrainey Road No.3 (at wall near A2)
Victoria Road at end of grass verge	Ballygrainey Road opposite No.15
Tudor Oaks No 3 at wall	Dalchoolin at No 19
Cultra Avenue opposite No.41	

HELEN'S BAY – 3 BINS	
Quarry Court past Street Light No.3	Grey Point at Street Light No.3
Ballymoney Road near Whinney Hill	

CRAWFORDSBURN – 6 BINS	
Ballymullen Road opposite No.40	Burnside Park at No.2 at wall/Meadow Way
Ballymullen Road at No.6	Meadow Park North No 11 at mini pillar
Meadow Way (junction near Ballymullan Road)	Carolsteen Park at No.1A junction Bridge Road

BANGOR – 110 BINS	
Killaire Avenue opposite Street Light No.8 (at fence)	Rugby Avenue opposite No.60
Ailsa Park at Street Light No.3	Donard Avenue No.44 (upper side of BT pole)
Ravelstone Avenue junction Killaire Park (at wall)	Donard Avenue No.25
Killaire Avenue at No 5	Maryville Park opposite No.22
Station Rd opposite Street Light No.15 (on grass) below No.68 on waste ground	Bryansglen West No.7 (lower side of Street Light)
Station View at Street Light No.1	Bryansglen Avenue No.21
Wandsworth Park junction Wandsworth Road	Grange Avenue No.5
Lyndhurst Avenue opposite No.2	Bryansburn Gardens @ No.10 in corner
Sharman Rise opposite no.10	Downshire Road upper side of Maxwell Road at Street Light No.14
Kilieen Avenue near Street Light No.9	Downshire Road lower side of Maxwell Road at Street Light No 15
Jubilee Drive near Street Light No.15	Clelland Park South at No.12
Viceroy's Wood at entrance half way up hill	Alexandra Gardens Street Light No 6
Springhill Heights No.10	Church Avenue junction Church Drive at wall
Farm Grove junction Springhill Avenue	Abbey Park No.49/51
Bryansford Meadow opposite Street Light No.3	Balloo Crescent opposite Howells
Ballyquinton Gardens side of No.18 at BT pole	Ballyree Gardens opposite No 9 (near steps)
Kilclief Gardens at Street Light No.474	Willowbrook Rise at side of No 1 at wall
Craigboy Mews at telegraph pole	Willowbrook Park at No.62
Balligan Gardens at Street Light No.403	Cranley Road opposite No.4
Birch Park junction Birch Drive	Cranley Grove Street Light No. 4
Clandeboye Way at Street Light No.1	Cranley Grove Street Light No 9
Monea Way at Street Light No.11 at wall	Cranley Hill No.2
Rostrevor Way at No.12	Cranley Ave opposite Street Light No.1
Clandeboye Way near Street Light No 10	Irvine Park outside No 38
Rostrevor Drive opposite name plate	Hanover Chase at footpath beside No 7 Hanover Court
Enterprise Road opposite Street Light No.2	Beaumont Drive outside No.26
Moyne Road, Conlig, junction Vermont Avenue at Street Light No.5	Malvern Heights at street nameplate
Bangor Road, Conlig, at top of Green Road	Ravenswood opposite No 10
Meadowvale opposite No.15	2 Kinwood Road at Junction with Albany Road
Meadowvale Park at Street Light No.2	Marlo Crescent at Street Light No.2
Beechfield junction Main Street, Conlig	Fernbank Park opposite Street Light No 3
Beechfield Avenue at Street Light No.18	Knightsbridge Court at entrance to NIE substation
Tower Road/Main Street, Conlig	Fairfield Road at wall of No.58
Forrest Hill/Main Street, Conlig	Fairfield Road opposite No.103 on verge
Forrest Hill, Conlig at Street Light No 10 at side of No. 74	Dellmont Drive at Street Light 4 outside No 10
Westmorland Crescent side of No.2 (on grass)	Sunningdale Park No.7
Westmorland Crescent at Street Light No.8	Glenanne Park opposite Sunningdale Court between hedges
Harehills Drive junction Westmorland Crescent	Stanley Road opposite No.9
Silverstream Crescent at No.61 (in laneway)	Seaforth Road opposite Street Light No.3
Silverstream Road at Street Light No 9	Grove Park junction Bellevue
Silverstream Drive at No.18 (at wall)	Baylands Fourth Avenue at No.4
Silverstream Avenue at No 31	Beverly Hills junction Beverly Drive at white wall
Manor Park/Manor Avenue	Beverly Gardens junction Beverly Drive opposite No.34
Hillcrest Walk outside No 9	Conniston Drive beside Street Light No.2
Bangor Police Station/Castle Park Avenue	Chippendale Vale junction Chippendale Park
King Street at sign no. 4	Ardmillan Park Street Light No 4

BANGOR – 110 BINS	
Tennyson Avenue at Street Light No.1	Thornleigh Gardens Street Light No 6
Princetown Road at Junction of Seacourt Lane	Windmill Lane at Street Light No.1
Lorelei opposite Street Light 1 at garage	Portview/Ballymacconnell Road
Ranfurlly Avenue at Street Light No 15	Towerview at Street Light No.4
Princetown Road opposite Street Light No 9	Ivyhill Crescent at Street Light No. 2
Knockmore Park t Street Light No 12	Ballymacormick Park at name plate
Manse Road at Entrance to No.12	Towerview Crescent opposite No.101 at Street Light No.20
Railwayview Street No.54	Towerview Crescent at side wall of No 125
Windsor Gardens at No.2-4	Towerview Avenue outside No 14

GROOMSPORT – 7 BINS	
The Brae junction Ard-Na-Ree	Springwell Crescent opposite Street Light No 4
Springwell Drive beside Street Light No.3	The Brae (at wall opposite Hillfoot)
Springwell Drive junction The Brae opposite No.7	Glenganagh Park at Street Light No 3
Springwell Crescent No.58 at BT pole	

Traffic Lights

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of maintaining traffic lights in the last financial year. (AQW 4395/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that its expenditure on routine traffic light maintenance in the 2010/11 financial year was £731,000.

In addition, non-routine costs, such as damage caused by road traffic collisions or utility road openings, are estimated at £510,000. Roads Service, where possible, endeavours to recover these non-routine costs.

Road and Footpath Repairs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria that are used to determine the priority of (i) road; and (ii) footpath repairs.

(AQW 4396/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 places a duty on my Department's Roads Service to maintain all public roads and footways in reasonable condition. To comply with this obligation, Roads Service has in place a set of maintenance standards, which establish the frequencies for road inspections dependent on traffic volumes, and specify response times for the repair of defects.

Inspection frequencies vary from daily cycles for motorways, to four-monthly cycles for carriageways and footways carrying low volumes of traffic. Response times specified for the repair of defects are dependent on the severity of the defect and range from one calendar day, to the inclusion of the defect in the next work programme for that particular route.

In addition to response maintenance, Roads Service also implements a programme of planned maintenance on its existing rural and urban road and footway networks to ensure that these assets remain safe and serviceable to users. Priorities are assessed on the basis of information obtained from condition surveys, other works programmes and professional engineering assessments. This information is used to prepare work programmes, which are subsequently presented by Roads Service to the various District Councils at their Spring/Autumn meetings.

A5 and A26: Traffic Volume

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average daily traffic volume on the (i) A5; and (ii) A26 roads in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4442/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it collects data from approximately 300 automatic traffic counting sites located throughout the Northern Ireland road network.

Details of the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) traffic flow information, recorded at various locations on the A5 and A26 roads in each of the last five years are provided in the table below:

Road	Census Point No	Location	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
A5	390	Londonderry – Strabane at New Buildings	12,030	11,570	11,750	11,584	11,428
A5	391	Victoria Road, Londonderry at Bolies	17,390	16,010	16,860	17,452	-
A5	608	Ballygawley – Aughnacloy (South of A4 Junction)	6,800	6,720	6,503	6,989	7,420
A5	610	Omagh – Ballygawley, South of B122 (past Junction of U1306)	12,290	11,850	12,010	Replaced by site 675	
A5	675	A5 Tullyvar Road, Ballygawley	-	-	-	11,624	11,688
A5	623	Sion Mills – Strabane, at Ballyfatten	14,060	13,930	14,060	13,885	14,063
A5	626	Omagh – Newtownstewart, at Conneywarren	13,850	13,560	13,500	13,056	13,722
A5	644	Omagh Throughpass (West of Dublin Road at Academy)	21,420	21,640	21,650	21,595	22,029
A5	645	Omagh By-Pass, at footbridge	21,270	20,970	20,700	20,438	21,181
A5	648	Strabane By-Pass (Barnhill Road, West of Derry Road)	14,040	14,020	14,220	14,299	14,147
A5	649	Omagh By-Pass, at Gortrush	17,060	16,840	16,750	16,634	17,024
A5	652	Aughnacloy – Monaghan (North of river Blackwater)	8,910	8,890	7,590	7,813	7,663
A5	653	Ballygawley – Omagh (North of Ballygawley Roundabout)	11,920	11,180	11,350	10,790	9,351
A5	657	Newtownstewart By-Pass (West of Plumbridge Road, opposite lay-by)	10,140	9,650	9,600	9,343	9,574
A5	659	Strabane By-Pass Stage 2	15,410	15,410	15,492	15,671	15,868
A5	660	Omagh – Ballygawley, South of Crevenagh Road Roundabout	15,140	14,760	15,100	14,857	15,311
A5	663	Victoria Road, Strabane	11,560	11,110	11,360	11,102	10,944
A26	104	Antrim – Ballymena, North of Dunsilly	30,950	29,970	30,640	30,472	30,642
A26	105	Ballymena Road, Antrim	18,420	17,120	16,880	16,993	16,521
A26	108	International Airport – Nutts Corner (North of A52 Nutts Corner Roundabout)	19,450	18,000	18,350	16,643	16,345
A26	109	Nutts Corner – Moira at Nutts Corner	13,270	12,890	11,970	11,183	11,307
A26	113	Ballymena – Ballymoney, North of M2	21,510	20,530	21,720	20,278	20,134
A26	130	Ballymena – Larne at Ballykeel	14,370	15,960	15,660	15,662	15,356
A26	153	Old Stone Road, Muckamore	-	-	9,610	8,773	8,786
A26	310	Coleraine – Ballymoney, South East of Ring Road	17,500	16,440	15,940	16,229	16,206
A26	316	Ballymoney By-Pass, East of Ballybogey road	17,700	16,910	17,150	15,516	17,384
A26	317	Ballymoney – Ballymena, South East of Ballymoney	14,730	14,310	15,050	14,617	14,678
A26	412	Banbridge – Lurgan, North of Broken Bridge	6,520	7,480	7,450	7,386	-
A26	791	Moira Road, near Moria, Co. Down	15,080	14,210	13,360	12,836	12,800

Flooding: Junction of Bog Road and Woodside Road, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what work has been carried out to rectify the flooding at the junction of the Bog Road and Woodside Road, Ballymena; and whether the problem is now resolved.

(AQW 4443/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I understand that the Member has recently been contacted by my Department's Roads Service and advised that the source of the flooding has now been identified, and attributed to poorly maintained, or inadequate, private agricultural land drainage.

I can advise that Roads Service intends to meet with DARD Rivers Agency staff, as soon as possible, to discuss this matter and request that the landowner is identified and the necessary field drainage is undertaken.

I can also advise that Roads Service will continue to monitor this location and seek to minimise the extent of the road flooding by ensuring roadside drainage gullies are clean and clear of debris.

Flooding: Junction of Craig Road and Church Road, Rasharkin

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what work has been carried out at the junction of Craig Road and Church Road, Rasharkin to ensure that there is no flooding.

(AQW 4444/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that an issue relating to water run off from private agricultural lands onto Craigs Road, following heavy prolonged rain, was resolved when a local farmer undertook drainage work within his lands last year, following consultation with Roads Service and direction from Rivers Agency.

In addition, Roads Service is nearing completion on works to install road drainage and roadside gullies on Church Lane, which will collect any water on Church Lane before it reaches Church Road.

I understand that two road culverts on Craigs Road, at this location, are often required to deal with large volumes of water runoff from the adjacent agricultural lands. Roads Service has advised that it will continue to carry out maintenance work on these culverts, to ensure they function at maximum capacity.

Traffic Wardens

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of operational traffic wardens.

(AQW 4458/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, during normal enforcement hours, the standard number of Traffic Attendants deployed across Northern Ireland is 134. The normal enforcement hours in Northern Ireland are, 10 hours per day, six days per week.

A5 Road Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the total spend to date on the A5 road project; (ii) whether the Republic of Ireland Government has provided 50 percent of the funding required to date; and (iii) whether he has pressed the Republic of Ireland Government for any outstanding funding.

(AQW 4470/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, the A5 and A8 projects have been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government. This included a commitment by the Irish Government to contribute £400 million towards constructing dual carriageways on the A5 western transport corridor and the A8 Belfast to Larne routes. This contribution was not linked to a percentage of costs.

For practical reasons, payments from the Irish Government have been made against milestones identified on the A5, which were agreed by the North South Ministerial Council.

To date, £40m has been spent on the development of the A5 road project.

Thus far, two payments, to the value of £19m, have been made by the Irish Government to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. It is anticipated that a further payment of £3m, which was ratified at the North South Ministerial Council Plenary Meeting on 18 November 2011, will be made later this financial year. This payment, when made, will honour the Irish Government's financial commitments to the project so far.

Sewage: Tempo, County Tyrone

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current sewerage system's ability to deal with sewage in Tempo, County Tyrone.

(AQW 4475/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that both the wastewater treatment works and sewerage network in Tempo are operating effectively and are able to cope satisfactorily with current capacity within the village. However, the wastewater treatment works is operating close to maximum capacity and NIW has been advising Planning Service that no further development in the area should be connected to the public sewerage system. This will remain necessary until the Works is upgraded to meet additional demand.

In line with a prioritisation programme developed in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the upgrade of the wastewater treatment works in Tempo is scheduled for the 2015/16 financial year, subject to the availability of funding.

Bus Station: Banbridge

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his position on the erection of a bus station in Banbridge.

(AQW 4480/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The construction of off-street bus facilities in Banbridge is a matter that has been considered for some time. Difficulties have arisen over land issues and a suitable site for such a facility and these have still to be resolved. Translink has not included this project in its current Corporate Plan because of the funding constraints set when this was initially produced.

Consideration may be given to bringing forward a project to construct such facilities in Banbridge if the requisite land and funding were available.

Grit Boxes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3776/11-15, whether he will take this opportunity to review the location and number of grit boxes.

(AQW 4484/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the winter service policy and procedures, which set out the criteria for the salting of roads, are based on the well established practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes.

That said, on roads adopted/maintained by Roads Service, which do not qualify for inclusion onto the gritting schedule, salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public, on a self help basis. Providing the necessary criteria is met, there are no restrictions placed on the location or on the number of salt bins which may be provided, although they will not normally be provided within 100m of another bin.

Roads Service has advised that arrangements are in place to maintain approximately 4,200 salt bins and almost 40,000 grit piles at pre-agreed strategic locations on public roads across Northern Ireland this winter. These locations meet the required criteria and are monitored on a regular basis, including during the cyclical highway inspections.

Given the considerable amount of resource already committed, I currently have no plans to change the criteria used for the provision of salt boxes.

Burst Pipes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to NI Water of repairing leaks from burst pipes in the last financial year.

(AQW 4504/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the cost of repairing leaks from burst pipes, which are part of the public water infrastructure, was £6.38 million during 2010/11.

Sewer Network: Rasharkin

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water will complete the upgrade works in Rasharkin to facilitate the Triangle Housing Association's social housing development.

(AQW 4508/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it has completed the upgrade of the public sewer network at Rasharkin. A review of the Rasharkin Wastewater Treatment Works has confirmed that there is adequate capacity to facilitate the proposed social housing development and Triangle Housing Association has been advised of the position.

Phosphoric Acid: Environmental Impact Studies

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the environmental impact studies that have been conducted on phosphoric acid over the last five years; (ii) the number of households in each town which have problems with lead pipes; and (iii) the other locations in the UK that add phosphoric acid to their drinking water.

(AQW 4510/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) environmental impact assessments were carried out at specific locations prior to the use of phosphoric acid, in order to ensure that there would be no detrimental effect on the phosphate removal process at major wastewater treatment works. The assessments used read across implications of similar assessments completed across the water industry. No further environmental impact assessments have been carried out over the past five years.

- (ii) NIW does not hold records of households with lead pipes and is therefore unable to provide the information requested.
- (iii) Orthophosphate dosing is used widely in the UK as an appropriate first stage of achieving the new European standards for lead in drinking water. It is considered a preferred alternative to the widespread replacement of lead pipes. Around 95% of the UK's public water supplies are dosed with orthophosphate as a means of reducing lead exposure. In addition to NIW, the following GB water companies undertake orthophosphate dosing:-

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Anglian Water Services Ltd | ■ Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water |
| ■ Cambridge Water Company Plc | ■ Essex & Suffolk Water |
| ■ Dee Valley Water Plc | ■ Hartlepool Water Plc |

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Independent Water Networks | ■ South West Water Ltd |
| ■ Northumbrian Water Ltd | ■ Thames Water Utilities Ltd |
| ■ Portsmouth Water Plc | ■ United Utilities Water Plc |
| ■ Sutton And East Surrey Water Plc | ■ Veolia Water Central |
| ■ Southern Water Services Ltd | ■ Veolia Water East |
| ■ Scottish Water | ■ Veolia Southeast |
| ■ South Staffordshire Water Plc | ■ Wessex Water Services Ltd |
| ■ Severn Trent Water Ltd | ■ Yorkshire Water Services Ltd |

Phosphoric Acid: Drinking Water

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether (i) uranium; (ii) radionucleides; (iii) flouride; (iv) lead; (v) mercury; (vi) antimony; (vii) chromium; or (viii) aluminium are present in the phosphoric acid used to treat drinking water.

(AQW 4511/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the phosphoric acid used is an approved product by the Drinking Water Inspectorate for use by the drinking water industry. The product specification for the phosphoric acid supplied to NIW states that lead, mercury and fluoride are present in the product. None of the other chemical elements listed in the question are present.

Ulster Hospital: Bus Stop

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to providing a new bus service, or altering the existing service, to include a stop at the Ulster Hospital rather than a stop close to the Hospital.

(AQW 4531/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised me that there are no plans for a new or alternative bus service for the Ulster Hospital destination.

Translink has provided a turning circle in collaboration with the Ulster Hospital. There is a bespoke accessible route for pedestrians from the turning circle to the hospital entry points.

It is not considered appropriate for buses to further add to the traffic flow within the Hospital grounds and, furthermore, no lay-bys exist within the current road configuration to permit such a facility.

Residents' Parking Scheme: Central Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on a residents' parking scheme for central Bangor.

(AQW 4535/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) 2015 identified a number of locations where there could be parking restraint. The introduction of Residents' Parking Schemes is one method of control to restrict parking availability. My Department's Roads Service has initially focused on areas where the problems have been assessed to be most critical and long standing. Consequently, the introduction of Residents' Parking Schemes within the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) is currently focused in areas close to Belfast city centre.

You will be aware of the delays encountered and as a consequence, the development of Residents' Parking Schemes has been disappointingly slow, with local residents in the initial areas considered still not substantially supporting the detail of the proposals. However, officials are engaging with local communities in the Lower Malone and Stranmillis areas and, to a lesser degree, with representatives of the Markets East, Markets West and Barrack Street areas of Belfast, with the intention of developing and implementing schemes in those areas.

It is Roads Service's intention to work towards the introduction of Residents' Parking Schemes, where appropriate, within all areas of parking restraint identified in the BMTP, including Bangor, Carrickfergus and Lisburn.

In due course, Roads Service plans to introduce Residents' Parking Schemes in areas where there are considerable levels of non-residential parking within Bangor town centre. The progress of all Residents' Parking Schemes will depend on public acceptance and the availability of the necessary funding, and as such, I am currently not in a position to indicate when a scheme could be introduced in Bangor Town Centre.

Posters Erected by Republicans

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the legality of the posters erected by republicans on, or against, road signs in Rasharkin.

(AQW 4539/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the erection of the unauthorised posters on road signs in Rasharkin constitutes an offence under Article 87 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

Posters Erected by Republicans

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the procedure for removing the posters erected by republicans on, or against, road signs in Rasharkin; and whether he intends to remove these posters.

(AQW 4541/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the erection of the unauthorised posters on road signs in Rasharkin constitutes an offence under Article 87 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

A5 Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any penalty contractual consequences resulting from the inability of the A5 project to proceed as originally intended; if so, what is the extent of these penalties and whether the Republic of Ireland Government will meet half the cost of them.

(AQW 4550/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the contracts for the A5 Dualling project are in two phases. The first phase is to assist Roads Service and the scheme consulting engineers in the development of the design of the new dual carriageway in advance of making the statutory orders.

Progression to the second phase, which is the construction of the new dual carriageway, is conditional within the contract on a number of factors, including the availability of finance.

Roads Service currently anticipates that there will be no contractual penalties arising from any decision not to proceed with the project.

Roads: Cul Glas, Maghera and Cove Close, Ballyronan

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how long the residents of (i) Cul Glas, Maghera; and (ii) Cove Close, Ballyronan have been waiting for the adoption of their developments by Roads Service; and what action Roads Service has taken to progress the adoption.

(AQW 4558/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that planning approval for the five house development at Cul Glas, Maghera, was granted on the basis that it would be serviced by a private road. Accordingly, the development was not determined and there is no bond or agreement in place with my Department's Roads Service. Consequently, Roads Service will not undertake completion works and has no authority or obligation to issue enforcement proceedings against the developer for outstanding works.

However, if the infrastructure within Cul Glas is completed to an adoptable standard by the developer, or alternatively, the frontagers, Roads Service will, if requested, consider adopting the pavement.

With regard to Cove Close, Ballyronan, the bonds for this development were sealed in June and July of 2005 and the developer began requesting reductions in his bond in February 2006. The developer secured NI Water adoption in 2008 and, prior to the onset of the current difficult market conditions, had been fulfilling his responsibilities in respect of this development.

An Article 11 enforcement notice was served on the developer in February 2010 for the completion of outstanding works. At that time, the developer indicated that he would complete his obligations under the bond and agreement. However, he has currently failed to do so. Roads Service will re-assess the position in December, with a view to initiating enforcement proceedings.

Snow and Ice

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration is being given to making legislative changes that would give councils, which grit footpaths or clear footpaths of snow and ice, indemnification against legal claims from people who fall or injure themselves on these footpaths.

(AQW 4625/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I advised the Member in my response to his Assembly Question, AQW4036/11-15, Councils that sign up to the new partnering arrangements, or groups of traders acting on their behalf, will have the same indemnity benefits as Roads Service, under proposals put forward by my Department. This is on the basis that the Department has a power to take reasonable and practicable measures to prevent snow and ice from interfering with safe public passage over the public highway.

I believe the best way to deal with this issue is through the partnering arrangements currently being offered to Councils, and while new legislation may be necessary in the future, it is not an option I am actively pursuing at present.

DRD: Sports Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the funding his Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4643/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not provided any funding for the development and promotion of the sports listed in each of the last three years.

NI Water: Tender C071

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any agreed changes, additions, variations or amendments to the NI Water tender C071 since the date it was awarded.

(AQW 4655/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that contract C071 was awarded to Williams Industrial Services in October 2007. The following agreed changes, additions, variations or amendments have been made to the contract.

Description of change, addition, variation or amendment	Date
NIW exercised its right under the terms of the contract to extend C071 until 31 March 2010.	3 Sept 2009
NIW exercised its right under the terms of the contract to extend C071 until 30 September 2010.	9 Feb 2010
NIW further extended C071 until 31 December 2010.	17 Sept 2010
NIW further extended C071 until 31 January 2011.	22 Dec 2010
NIW further extended C071 until 10 March 2011.	31 Jan 2011
NIW further extended C071 until 10 March 2012 date and agreed a price increase of 7.9 %	12 Apr 2011

In addition to the extensions detailed above, changes to NIW's operating model including revised structures, contract resource requirements, geographical areas and bases have been taken into account in applying the contract although these have not been formally reflected as contract variations.

Private Housing Developments: Bonds

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how many bonds relating to private housing developments have been accessed by Roads Service in each of the last five years; and (ii) the cost of accessing these bonds.

(AQW 4723/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the number of bonds relating to private housing developments that have been accessed by my Department's Roads Service in each of the last five years:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
No of Bonds Accessed	8	13	17	34	44

Roads Service has advised that the only costs associated with accessing these bonds are staff costs, which would be difficult to quantify and for which information is not readily available.

Roads: Hawthornes Estate, Maghera

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what action Roads Service has taken to complete the Hawthornes Estate, Maghera; and when the Roads Service became aware of the problems in the Estate.

(AQW 4724/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service served Article 11 enforcement notices in respect of the six phases of the Hawthorne's Estate development on 8 November 2011.

Roads Service officials became aware of the delay in completing the infrastructure during 2010 however, the developer had, until recently, remained committed to his obligations in respect of the pavement and footways. Roads Service staff continued negotiations with the developer until October of this year, when the decision was taken to issue the enforcement notices.

Unfortunately, due to the pressures of other Roads Service works in the Magherafelt District, it is anticipated that it will be the 2012/13 financial year before a contractor can be instructed to complete the roads and footways in the Hawthorne's Estate.

This private development will remain the responsibility of the developer, or his trustees, in the interim, prior to Roads Service undertaking the necessary remedial works.

Plumbing Inspection Teams: Work Mobile Phones

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water withdrew work mobile phones from its Plumbing Inspection Teams prior to last year's severe winter weather; and, if so, was the reason for the withdrawal because they were not considered essential staff.

(AQW 4772/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that some Water Regulation Inspectors had their phones withdrawn following a mobile phone efficiency review, undertaken during early 2010, which aimed to reduce operating costs.

Phones were withdrawn from staff who were not considered essential users because they were not part of an emergency on-call rota and there were no significant health and safety risks associated with their work.

Metro Services: Signs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it has cost to translate the signs on some Metro services into the Irish language; and who authorised this expenditure.

(AQW 4797/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that cost of translating and proofing signage on Metro Service 10 was £144.90. The introduction of bilingual signage and passenger information was a priority for the previous Minister for Regional Development. This expenditure was authorised at the appropriate level within Translink.

Metro Services: Signs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the signs on some Metro services have been translated into the Irish language, whether he will translate the signs into other European languages to facilitate tourists.

(AQW 4798/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The vast majority of place names on the destination boards of Metro bus services do not translate into other European languages. However, Translink has a policy to provide information about its services in other languages, where a demand can be demonstrated.

Translink is open to providing information which will encourage the use of bus and rail services by visitors from other European countries, where the demand can be demonstrated.

Printed information on Translink services in the form of a booklet "Travelling with Translink" has been made available in languages other than English and Irish (specifically, Portuguese, Lithuanian and Polish) where demand/usage has been brought to the company's attention.

Roads: Crosskeys Road, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what works Roads Service (i) has carried out on; and (ii) has planned for, the Crosskeys Road, Ballymena in 2011/12.

(AQW 4889/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Down Community Transport

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding Down Community Transport has received in this financial year; and what is its allocation for each of the next three financial years.

(AQW 4899/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: For the financial year ending 31 March 2012 the Down Community Transport Partnership will receive funding of £395,618.86.

Funding has not yet been agreed for the next three financial years and is subject to the completion of successful annual business plans agreed by my Department.

Sludge Disposal Incinerators: Duncrue Street, Belfast

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the availability for use of the sludge disposal incinerators in Duncrue Street, Belfast.

(AQW 4997/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that one incinerator was brought back into service in May 2011, and both incinerators have been available since 12 September 2011. There have been occasions since 12 September when one or other incinerator has been unavailable, either for planned maintenance and operational purposes, or for short duration unplanned interruptions.

Sludge storage capacity on site is being utilised when either incinerator is unavailable and, since 10 October 2011, there has been no requirement to redirect sludge for alternative disposal to land.

NI Water: Chief Executive

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to outline the reasons behind his decision to give the Chief Executive of NI Water a pay rise; (ii) how such an increase can be justified when public sector workers face pay freezes or job losses; (iii) from where the resources to fund this pay rise will come; (iv) what he deems would be a 'satisfactory performance'

from NI Water over the winter period to trigger this pay increase; and (v) how much of the new salary is subject to NI Water reaching those performance targets.

(AQW 5060/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) and (ii) The increase in the salary of the Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Water (NIW) was proposed by the Board of the Company which is his employer. The Board had undertaken external benchmarking of the salary and justified it in light of the specific demands of the job. In approving the proposal, I was particularly mindful of the need for stability and leadership in an organisation which provides such an essential service for the people of Northern Ireland.
- (iii) The increase will be funded out of NIW's existing resource budget, which continues to reduce as the Company makes significant savings.
- (iv) & (v) The new salary will be payable from 1 April 2012. It will be for the Remuneration Committee of the NIW Board to justify any decision to back-date the increase to 1 November 2011 in light of the Company's performance over the winter period. The Remuneration Committee will develop criteria on which to base its decision.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Langley Estate, Ballynahinch

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development when all the Housing Executive properties in the Langley Estate, Ballynahinch, will have double-glazed windows.

(AQW 4067/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive currently owns 125 properties in the Langley Estate in Ballynahinch and of these 48 already have double glazing. The remaining 77 properties are included in the Downpatrick Local Area Priority Scheme programmed for March 2012. Under this scheme, window replacement will be dependent on a full condition survey and availability of finance.

I am determined that all Housing Executive homes in Northern Ireland will be double glazed by 2014/15 and I have been successful in having this included in the draft Programme for Government which is currently out for consultation.

Ilex: Derry Regeneration

Mr Eastwood asked Minister for Social Development, with regard to the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4244/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The One Plan for Londonderry is a cross-cutting plan which cannot be delivered by any one Department acting alone. While my Department will not have additional funding for the One Plan, the work and budget of my North West Development Office will be prioritised in line with the Transformational Themes set out in the Plan. My Department will also champion the Quality Spaces, Places and Neighbourhoods Catalyst Programme and work with key stakeholders to ensure delivery of projects under that programme.

In addition, in 2011/12 my Department has allocated the following budget to the North West Development Office for projects which will complement the One Plan for Londonderry regeneration programme:

- £5 million for United Kingdom City of Culture;
- £4.5 million for Neighbourhood Renewal;
- £1.8 million for Physical Development, Public Realm and Environment Improvement works; and
- £0.2 million for Fort George decontamination.

Supporting People Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department is aware of any projects jointly funded by the Supporting People Programme and the Western Health and Social Care Trust that have not received the funding allocated by the Trust.

(AQW 4281/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are 61 schemes in the Western Health & Social Care Trust area jointly funded by my Department through the Supporting People programme and the Department of Health. I can confirm that Supporting People revenue funding for these schemes has been paid.

I am not in a position to comment on funding allocated by the Western Health & Social Care trust as it would be more appropriate for the Department of Health to answer.

New Lodge: Seven Tower Flats

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development when he became aware of the serious safety concerns about the condition of the balconies in the Seven Tower flats in the New Lodge area of North Belfast; and what action he will take to ensure the safety of residents.

(AQW 4283/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Whilst I have had several recent briefings from the Housing Executive on the proposed cladding of the 'Seven Towers', I was not aware of issues in respect of the balconies that I first learnt of through the media.

I am not satisfied with how this issue has been handled, particularly given the way this information first came to light.

In his e mail dated 13 June 2011 the Housing Executive's consultant expressed concern about the condition of the metal surrounds to the balcony glazing units in the Seven Towers flats. In that email which was released under a Freedom of Information request, the consultant stated that 'it would not be unreasonable to stop people using these balconies in due course'.

However, following further discussion, the consultant confirmed that no urgent action was required other than regular monitoring.

That monitoring has since been undertaken in a sample survey of 70 flats and whilst some routine repairs have been identified, in no case was any issue identified that would require residents to stop using the balconies.

It is therefore regrettable that only part of the story was told when this issue first arose in the media and residents left to think there was some risk to their health and safety when using the balconies in their flats. The Housing Executive has now written to all residents of the flats to clarify the situation and I trust residents are more reassured now about the situation than they would have been on first hearing of this in the media some weeks ago.

New Lodge: Seven Tower Flats

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development why the decision was taken not to inform residents of the Seven Tower flats in the New Lodge area of North Belfast, that a recommendation had been made that their balconies should not be used due to health and safety concerns.

(AQW 4284/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am disappointed about how this story first broke in the media, not least because of the inaccurate and misleading way that partial information has been used to portray the balconies of the flats in the 'Seven Towers' as dangerous. I am not surprised at the reaction to this story and can understand the very legitimate concern of residents to it.

Whilst there was an initial email from a consultant that suggested it would not be unreasonable to stop people using their balconies in due course, however, following further discussions with the consultant it was confirmed that no urgent action was required other than regular monitoring.

That monitoring has already started and a sample survey of 70 flats has already been undertaken and no balconies found to be unsafe for use. Further action is of course planned to monitor the balconies in all Towers and if repairs are needed, they will be undertaken without delay.

The Housing Executive have since written to all residents in the Towers to clarify the situation and I regret that this direct communication with residents did not take place before the issue was allowed to appear as it did in the media.

St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Joint Service Housing Advice Office about the housing at the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena being made available for purchase by serving and ex-military personnel.

(AQW 4292/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am not aware of any discussions with the Joint Service Housing Advice Office about the housing at the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena being made available for purchase by serving and ex military personnel.

Pension Credit

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the criteria used to determine eligibility for pension credit; and (ii) if there are any planned changes to the criteria; and how his Department intends to communicate these changes to those affected.

(AQW 4313/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Pension Credit is a means tested benefit for persons of state retirement age. It is a non-contributory, non taxable benefit made up of two components, Guaranteed Credit and Savings Credit. It is available as a safety net for persons on low incomes and aims to top up any money a person or their partner have coming in, to a minimum guaranteed level set by the Government each year. It also aims to pay a small benefit for people who have modest financial savings or have made modest provisions for their retirement. In calculating entitlement, both income and savings a person or their partner are both considered. Pension Credit includes help towards mortgage payments and service charges for home owners,

The minimum age to qualify for Guarantee Credit is gradually rising from age 60 to 65. The minimum age for Savings Credit is 65. A person may get either or both, depending on the level of their income and savings. Any savings over £10,000 will be counted as income at £1.00 per week for every £500.00 or part thereof.

Receipt of the Guarantee Credit passports people onto full Housing Benefit.

There are no plans to change the eligibility criteria for Pension Credit.

Disability Living Allowance: Down's Syndrome

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development how many children with Down's Syndrome, under the age of five, are in receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4314/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below. The figures show the number of claims where the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance was in payment at the date of extract. The date of extract was 30 October 2011, the most recent information available. Entitlement to the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance can only be considered for children from the age of 3 upwards.

Name of Health and Social Care Trust	Number of recipients of DLA as requested
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	9
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	14
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	7
Southern Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	8
Western Health and Social Care Trust	5

Construction: Invoices

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4332/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not feasible to isolate construction related invoices from other Departmental invoices. On that basis my Department has provided details on the proportion of all invoices paid within 30 days in the last three years. Payment performance specific to construction invoices for the Department's arm's length bodies is also included as appropriate. See table below for details.

% Paid On Time	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Department for Social Development	92.21	87.04	94.83
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	98.82	98.68	96.08
Ilex	90.48	94.44	90.48

Pension Credit Payment Study

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his assessment of the Pension Credit Payment Study undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions; and (ii) whether he plans to introduce a similar scheme.

(AQW 4353/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I welcome and support the Pension Credit Payment study work undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain. The study period concluded in March 2011 and a detailed evaluation report is expected to be published by the Department for Work and Pensions in spring 2012. There are no plans to replicate the study in Northern Ireland. My Department is tracking the Department for Work and Pensions study and any recommendations or changes that emerge as a result of the study will be carefully considered for Northern Ireland when the detailed evaluation report is published at which point I will consider the possibility of the introduction of automatic payment of State Pension Credit.

Department for Work and Pensions

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his assessment of whether the public sector pensions he administers on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions have peaked in absolute terms and as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product; (ii) to detail the total amount paid out in pensions in each of the last four years; and (iii) the projected cost of pensions in the next four years.

(AQW 4362/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development does not administer any public sector pensions on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Public sector pensions in Northern Ireland are a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel and other sponsoring Departments.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration he has given to implementing and funding a financial capability strategy for people in fuel poverty.

(AQW 4373/11-15)

Mr McCausland: If people increase their financial capability skills and are better able to budget, they will be able to identify better ways of paying for their energy. The Warm Homes Scheme already offers applicants advice on energy saving and budgeting for energy bills. My officials are currently in discussion with colleagues from OFMdfM to determine how we can use the Social Protection Fund to further assist households in fuel poverty.

Social Housing: West Green, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the planned social housing at West Green, Holywood, including the timescale for the commencement and completion of construction work.

(AQW 4406/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Holywood is an area of high housing need and an Economic Appraisal for West Green recommended the demolition of 36 flats and 10 adjacent properties and their proposed replacement with new build.

Demolition of the 36 flats was completed in March 2011 and of the remaining 10 houses, 8 are now vacant, 1 is still tenanted and 1 is privately owned. The Housing Executive is endeavouring to secure alternative accommodation for the remaining tenant and is currently engaged in negotiations in relation to buying back the privately owned property. As soon as all these dwellings are vacant and in the Housing Executive's ownership the intention is to demolish them to make way for the new build.

A Housing Association has recently been nominated to deliver the new build scheme and will shortly seek to appoint a design team to bring forward a planning application, in conjunction with the community and elected representatives. Whilst I am optimistic that construction work can begin during the next financial year, I am unable to give any firm commitment on the timing as there are still issues to overcome in securing possession of the remaining units and then securing the planning approval necessary for the new build.

I will be happy to keep the member informed on progress.

Double Glazing

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4003/11-15, what consideration he has given to introducing a double-glazing scheme for those not resident in Housing Executive homes, with a possible qualifying criteria similar to that for the Boiler Replacement Scheme.

(AQW 4427/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am fully aware of the benefits of installing double-glazing windows in properties and I am delighted that a commitment has been made in the Programme for Government to provide full double glazing in all Housing Executive properties by 2014/15. I have asked officials to review my department's approach to improving domestic energy efficiency to owner occupiers and the private rented sector in the future. This review will examine how we target resources and an assessment of the most appropriate energy efficiency improvement measures.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of new claimants of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last five years; and of these, how many received the Allowance after (i) submitting an application form; (ii) providing supporting evidence; (iii) providing a GP report; and (iv) attending a face-to-face assessment.

(AQW 4460/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because the Department of Work and Pensions IT system that is used to administer Disability Living Allowance is not configured to report the information in this way. The IT system reports management information on what the Decision-Maker records as the primary source of evidence used in determining all Disability Living Allowance new claims within pre set categories.

The table below provides a breakdown of Disability Living Allowance new claims determined, including refusals, in each of the last five years, and the volume of decisions made by primary source of evidence within the four main categories.

Year	Disability Living Allowance Cases Determined	Claim Form and Corroborative Statement (1)	Claim form and further medical information supplied by customer and/or another person	General Practitioner Report	Examining Medical Practitioner Report
2006/07	21339	1482	1633	14614	3468
2007/08	22634	1575	1551	15908	2981
2008/09	23161	1672	1539	17430	2329
2009/10	24938	1904	1990	17803	3034
2010/11	21420	1847	1419	15524	2285

Note:

(1) A corroborative statement is a medical statement from a Health Care Professional which has been included on and submitted as part of the claim form by the customer.

(2) the cases determined figure does tally with the total of the four evidence columns in the table because there are a small number of cases where other sources of evidence have been used by the decision maker and recorded as the primary evidence source e.g. non fee paying reports such as hospitals reports, some consultant reports and school reports.

Boiler Replacement Grant

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to outline the rationale behind the decision not to provide a boiler replacement grant, through the Warm Homes Scheme, to older people in receipt of housing benefit; and (ii) how these people can get their boilers replaced.

(AQW 4472/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The rationale for the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme was to offer assistance to older householders on low income who missed out on other Government energy efficiency improvement schemes such as the Warm Homes Scheme. Householders who receive Housing Benefit have always been eligible to apply to the Warm Homes Scheme, which targets properties where there is no central heating, solid fuel, Economy 7 or Liquid Petroleum Gas heating. From 2001 until 2009 the Warm Homes Scheme upgraded heating systems for those aged 60 and over and in receipt of Housing Benefit; however in 2008 the Northern Ireland Audit Office questioned the value for money of upgrading heating systems. I want to emphasise that the Boiler Replacement Scheme is a pilot scheme and I have asked officials to review the Warm Homes Scheme and the Boiler Replacement Scheme to examine how we target our resources and the measures we use to improve domestic energy efficiency in the future. A range of other energy efficiency improvement schemes are available and are funded through the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP). The Energy Savings Trust, freephone number 0800 512 012, can advise on grant availability in Northern Ireland.

Pobal

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development why his Department's logo appeared at the end of a letter sent to MLAs from Pobal on 2 November 2011.

(AQW 4482/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Pobal is in receipt of funding from the Department for Social Development under the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Programme. It is a general condition in contracts for funding that organisations must include in any publicity, brochures or other material appropriate references to the assistance made available by the Department.

Newbuild Social Housing Properties

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of new build social housing properties that have been completed in the Foyle constituency in each of the last five years.[R]

(AQW 4493/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of new build completions in the Foyle constituency over the last five years are as follows:-

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
101	115	170	71	142	599

Newbuild Social Housing Properties

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of new build social housing properties that have been completed in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4494/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total number of completed new build social houses in the overall Social Housing Development Programme in each of the last five years was as follows:-

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
1625	1410	1365	1504	1409	7313

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people availed of the Warm Homes Scheme in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 4522/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A total of 10,383 households were assisted by the Warm Homes Scheme in the 2010/2011 financial year.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) individuals; and (ii) families have been granted assistance under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme in each of the last three years, broken down by (a) security force personnel; (b) retired security force personnel; and (c) civilians.

(AQW 4525/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not hold information as to whether the Security Force personnel were retired or in employment or if any of the properties were in single or family occupancy.

However, during the period 1 November 2008 to 31 October 2011 the Housing Executive purchased 81 properties through the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme. Of these, 44 properties were Security Force personnel and 37 were Civilian. The breakdown is as follows:-

01/11/2008 – 31/10/2008	01/11/2009 – 31/10/2010	01/11/2010 – 31/10/2011
11 Security Force personnel, 14 Civilian	19 Security Force personnel, 19 Civilian	14 Security Force personnel, 4 Civilian

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the pension protection for staff if they are transferred to the proposed Social Enterprise Landlord organisation. [R]

(AQW 4529/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, whether a tenant's Right to Buy will be protected. [R]

(AQW 4530/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no proposals in the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for a change in policy in terms of the House Sales Scheme (the "Right to Buy").

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the proposals contained in PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (i) whether he intends to hold a tenant consultation with the 90,000 key stakeholders; and (ii) how he will ensure that the consultation is conducted in a reliable and accountable manner.[R]

(AQW 4533/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development, given the commitment of the Executive to addressing social need within the most disadvantaged areas, can he offer an assurance that there will be no reduction in support, resources and funding to any Neighbourhood Renewal area.

(AQW 4537/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to maintaining the resources and funding available for the Executive's cross departmental Neighbourhood Renewal programme, at its current level.

At the same time, I want to maximise the impact of those resources and funding in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas by reducing overheads and duplication, making sure that more of the money goes into delivering the high priority services that these areas need and making sure that what we do fund produces results

Social Housing: Tender List Criteria

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration he has given to relaxing the Social Housing Tender List criteria, to allow small construction firms that do not meet the financial or work requirements, to apply for housing contracts.

(AQW 4538/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am particularly mindful of the important contribution Small and Medium Enterprises make to the Northern Ireland economy and I am keen to support any initiative that may help them in these challenging economic times.

Central Procurement Directorate has recently issued a Procurement Guidance Note (02/11) that aims to help Small and Medium Enterprises access public sector contracts and the Housing Executive as the CoPE (Centre of Procurement Expertise) for the Housing Sector is already looking at the application of this guidance.

However, we must still ensure when selecting tenderers that minimum financial and technical standards are met and that will inevitably involve an assessment that will quite rightly exclude those Small and Medium Enterprises who are not capable of reaching those minimum standards.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, given that one in every two households is in fuel poverty, whether he would consider revising the current Warm Homes Scheme to reflect the success of the Kirklees Warm Zone Scheme area based approach, which under the existing budget could help nearly 70 percent more households.[R]

(AQW 4548/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following the recent report by Professor Christine Liddell entitled 'Defining Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland: A Preliminary Review' I have asked officials to review my department's approach to improving domestic energy efficiency. This review will examine how we target our resources and the measures we use to improve energy efficiency. I am aware of the success of some area based approaches to energy efficiency, like the Kirklees model which was primarily a carbon reduction project

Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average waiting time for an appointment with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

(AQW 4562/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department financially supports the provision of voluntary generalist advice services to those most disadvantaged in our community. This financial support is match funded by local councils. Councils have responsibility for commissioning advice services at local level from a range of providers, which may include Citizen's Advice Bureaux. The Department does not hold details of local service level arrangements or individual performance indicators.

Private Landlords

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place to stop private landlords from raising levels of rent above and beyond the actual value.

(AQW 4563/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Rents in the private rented sector are subject to market forces except for a small number of protected and statutory tenancies which are subject to rent control (1,100 properties).

The rent charged by a private landlord is a matter for agreement between the landlord and tenant. A landlord is required by law to give the tenant four weeks written notice of any increase in the rent.

Winter: Help for Unemployed

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Social Development, given that people in 121,000 households are unemployed, what measures have been put in place to ensure that people will not perish from cold or hunger during this winter.

(AQW 4569/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Financial help is available through a range of social security benefits to individuals on low income depending on their individual and family circumstances. Cold Weather Payments may also be paid to those satisfying the qualifying conditions during periods of exceptionally cold weather. Additionally, individuals who are not automatically entitled may claim a Winter Fuel Payment up to 30 March 2012 if they are born on or before 5 January 1951.

My Department's new Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" was launched in April 2011. The strategy takes forward energy brokering, calls for action on the price of oil imports, and develops a range of other initiatives. The Department also delivers the Warm Homes Scheme and the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of vulnerable fuel poor households. In addition, the Housing Executive administers an annual Heating Replacement Scheme which improves the energy efficiency of their stock.

Promoting benefit uptake is a key priority for my Department and the Social Security Agency has a wide range of services available to make people aware of their entitlement to benefit. This includes outreach services, participation in local promotional activity, the production of specific publications, some in minority ethnic languages, NI Direct website, an online Benefits Adviser Service and general assistance with information available through our network of local and centralised offices.

Since 2005 benefit uptake activity has generated an additional £37.6 million of annual benefit and arrears, £10.5 million of which has been paid to those aged under 60. As part of the 2011/12 Benefit Uptake Programme 25,000 people will receive a personal letter of invitation offering a full and confidential benefit assessment through the Independent Advice Sector.

I have also recently announced additional investment in benefit uptake activity. £375,000 has been allocated through the Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake to enable 7 projects to be taken forward by community and voluntary sector partners to test new and innovative ways of reaching people with potential unclaimed benefit entitlement. Specific initiatives will aim to address uptake of benefits amongst low income, unemployed, families and young people not in education, training or employment.

Rent Convergence: Proposals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the proposals for rent convergence and an increase of approximately 40 percent in Housing Executive rent charges.

(AQW 4578/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am not aware of any such proposals the member refers to. The Housing Executive has commissioned a research project on behalf of the Department, which examines the issue of Housing Executive and Housing Association rents. The project is due to complete by the end of March 2012 and following analysis of the results I expect conclusions and recommendations to be presented to me for consideration.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the proposed transfer of staff to a Social Enterprise Landlord Organisation contained within PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 4579/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Terminated Benefit Claims

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the 7,454 benefit claimants who had their claims terminated for failing to attend a benefits interview between 1 April 2010 and 31 January 2011 (i) the reasons for the termination of these claims; (ii) the cost of administering the sanctions; (iii) whether Crisis Loans were awarded; and the timescale for awarding a loan in each case; and (iv) whether the claimants have made new claims.

(AQW 4595/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not hold the information in the detail requested.

- (i) The cases were terminated because the customers failed to attend mandatory interviews, which are a condition of continuing entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance, and subsequently failed to furnish any reasons for their non-attendance.
- (ii) This information is not available.

(iii) & (iv) While the Department is able to provide the number of cases terminated, it does not record details of individual customers and is therefore unable to provide this additional information.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what examination has been carried out on the Social Enterprise Landlord organisation proposed in PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. **(AQW 4600/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive: Social Enterprise Landlord Organisation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his proposals for the terms and conditions of employment for staff who might relocate to the Social Enterprise Landlord organisation. **(AQW 4601/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to increase the uptake of social security benefits. **(AQW 4626/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: Promoting benefit uptake is a key priority for my Department and the Social Security Agency has since 2005, targeted specific people with potential benefit entitlement.. By June 2011 this work had generated an additional £37.6 million of annual benefit and arrears for people across Northern Ireland.

I have also agreed that this year £1.3m will be invested in the promotion of Benefit Uptake. Around 25,000 people on low incomes will receive a letter inviting them to have a full benefits assessment through the independent advice sector. A Freephone Benefits Advice Service is in place to assist older people to find out if there are benefits they could be missing out on. This service is currently being widely promoted through a television, radio, press and outdoor advertising campaign and over 1,000 calls have now been received since the campaign was launched on 14 November.

At the beginning of November I also announced contracts for community based projects which are being funded through the recently launched Innovation Fund to increase Benefit Uptake. These projects are focused on testing new and innovative ways of reaching people with potential unclaimed benefit entitlement.

There are also a wide range of general services available to make people aware of their entitlement to benefit. These includes outreach services, participation in local promotional activity, the production of specific publications, some in minority ethnic languages, NI Direct website, an online Benefits Adviser Service and general assistance with information available through our network of local and centralised offices.

Child Maintenance Payments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently contributing to child maintenance payments. **(AQW 4628/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: At the end of September 2011, non-resident parents within the statutory child maintenance scheme were contributing child maintenance in over 16,000 cases, to the benefit of over 21,000 children.

Child maintenance cases are made up of a parent (or person) with care, a non-resident parent and a child (or children). It should be noted that a non-resident parent may have more than one case as they may be paying child maintenance to more than one parent (or person) with care.

Pension Credit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he intends to take to increase the uptake of Pension Credit. (AQW 4634/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As outlined in my response to your recent question on the same topic, I am committed to improving the uptake of all benefits and through the Social Security Agency; my Department provides a range of services to make people aware of their entitlement.

The Social Security Agency has issued around 90,000 invitations to older people since 2005 offering a full benefit assessment through the independent advice sector. This assessment considers eligibility for all social security benefits as well as a range of other allowances and services. In addition, 145,000 mail shots have been issued to older people to specifically raise awareness of State Pension Credit. To date, the Benefit Uptake programme has generated total additional annual benefits and arrears of approximately £37.6m, of which £15m relates to over 4,900 additional awards of State Pension Credit.

The 2011/12 Benefit Uptake Programme will provide over 16,000 older people with a written invitation to avail of the opportunity of a full benefit assessment through the independent advice sector.

An Outreach to Older People service has been in place since 2009 which aims to reach older people who may have potential additional entitlement. This service uses promotional materials to advertise a Freephone benefits advice number as well as trusted community partners such as community groups, specific older peoples groups, faith based organisations, General Practitioner surgeries and pharmacies and also the provision of informal talks in similar settings. On 14 November, a province-wide advertising campaign promoting the freephone number was launched which aims to increase claims and improve the uptake of all older people's benefits. The campaign uses television, radio, press and outdoor locations to promote the Freephone Benefits Advice Line.

My Department has also allocated £375,000 for an Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake. These monies are being used to fund 7 new projects with the community and voluntary sector testing new and innovative ways of reaching people with potential unclaimed benefit entitlement. Two of the projects are specifically targeting older people.

Service delivery improvements have also been made in recent years to mitigate the risk that customers find the claim process difficult. When a customer calls to make a claim to State Pension they are asked if they would like to find out more about State Pension Credit and, if interested, the customer is transferred to a dedicated State Pension Credit claim line at which stage an enhanced tele-claims system is in operation which results in around 90% of claims being taken by telephone, without the need for customers to complete paper application forms.

Panel of Benefit Appeal Tribunals

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the daily rate of pay, or the rate of pay per appeal hearing, for members on the panel of benefit appeal tribunals. (AQW 4635/11-15)

Mr McCausland: All fee paid panel members receive fees payable on a sessional basis. A sessional sitting is for one half-day i.e. 3 ½ hours duration with either a morning or afternoon start time and may include multiple appeal hearings. The fees payable are detailed in the table below:

Sessional Fees for Panel Members					
FEE £	LEGAL	MEDICAL (No medical examination required)	MEDICAL (Medical examination possibly required)	FINANCIAL	DISABILITY
Per session	218.00	155.00	185.50	151.00	96.00
Excess hourly rate	62.25	43.10	53.00	43.10	27.40

Where a tribunal/session overruns by more than half an hour, a fee for lengthy attendance will be payable at the excess hourly rate shown for each additional hour or part thereof from the end of the standard session. No payment will be made for overruns of half an hour or less.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, if the proposals contained in PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are adopted (i) whether he can offer an assurance that the interests of staff will be protected; and (ii) what selection method for appointment to the Social Housing Authority and the Social Enterprise Landlord Organisation will be used; and how will he ensure that it is an equitable selection method. (AQW 4659/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in

the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

DSD: Assembly Questions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.

(AQW 4662/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and so the information requested is not available.

Disability Living Allowance: Appeals

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost to his Department of Disability Living Allowance appeals in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 4671/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested was provided in my response to your AQW 316/11-15 on 9 June 2011. Copy of this can be found in the Weekly Answers Booklet (Hansard) of 10 June 2011.

Housing Benefit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what is the weekly limit on the amount a person can receive in housing benefit.

(AQW 4692/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following the change in legislation in April 2011, the following limits are applicable to eligible rent levels (Local Housing Allowance) and consequently to awards of Housing Benefit in the private-rented sector: -

One-bed property	Two-bed	Three-bed	Four-bed and above
£250 per week	£290 per week	£340 per week	£400 per week

There are no equivalent limits applied in the social rented sector.

Double Glazing

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; and (iii) Portadown might benefit from the installation of double glazing as a result of the Programme for Government.

(AQW 4695/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

Following the consultation period and in anticipation of agreement to the draft Programme for Government, an extensive survey programme will be initiated to establish the number of Housing Executive dwellings that require double glazing. The Housing Executive will then draft a programme to ensure that double glazing is installed in all homes by the end of 2015.

In Banbridge two External Cyclical Maintenance schemes commenced this financial year which included window replacement where required to 360 dwellings. Also, an External Cyclical maintenance scheme commenced during this financial year in the Lurgan area which includes window replacement where required to 192 dwellings. A window replacement scheme for 215 dwellings in Portadown is also due to start during the current financial year.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development why the options contained within the PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive were not rural proofed.

(AQW 4703/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) financial institutions; and (ii) venture capitalists he, his Department or PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) with which he engaged as part of PwC's report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 4706/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I asked PwC to consult with key stakeholders on their proposals. PwC has engaged with a number of financial institutions including The Housing Finance Corporation, Royal Bank of Scotland, Barclays and Santander.

Housing Executive: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the extent to which the PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive met its Terms of Reference.

(AQW 4707/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am content that the PwC report fully meets with the Terms of Reference set by the previous Minister.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties do not have double glazing.

(AQW 4712/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems, the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 60% of its stock does not have double glazing.

I am determined that all Housing Executive homes in Northern Ireland will be double glazed by 2014/15 and I have been successful in having this included in the draft Programme for Government which is currently out for consultation.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in each District Council area will be eligible for the upgrade to double glazing as set out in the Programme for Government.

(AQW 4722/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

Following the consultation period and in anticipation of agreement to the draft Programme for Government, an extensive survey programme will be initiated to establish the number of Housing Executive dwellings that require double glazing. The Housing Executive will then draft a programme to ensure that double glazing is installed in all homes by the end of 2015.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have availed of the Warm Homes Scheme in the North Down area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4771/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current Warm Homes Scheme is in its third year. Information from the previous Warm Homes Scheme, which ended in July 2009, is not held in a format that can be broken down by Council area or financial year.

The Housing Executive therefore cannot provide information for the last 5 years.

Over the last 3 years in North Down a total of 749 households have been assisted by the Warm Homes Scheme as follows:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
306 households	319 households	124 households (to date)

Affordable Homes

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to define the term 'affordable homes'.

(AQW 4786/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The term affordable housing is broad and can be delivered through various mechanisms, for example, shared equity and shared ownership products for those seeking to buy their own home, but cannot afford to do so outright, as well rental properties at all levels. The Co-Ownership Scheme is presently the Department's main mechanism for delivering affordable homes to first time buyers.

Sir John Semple in his Review into Affordable Housing Report outlined that affordable housing should be related to the ability to pay; to be affordable, recommended housing costs should not exceed 35% of gross household income.

Affordable Homes

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many affordable homes have been delivered in each of the last four years.

(AQW 4787/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Co-Ownership Scheme remains the Department's main mechanism for delivering affordable homes to first time buyers. In each of the last four years the number of homes the Scheme has delivered is as follows:

2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
935	325	461	492

Social Housing: Properties

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing properties will be delivered in each of the next four years.

(AQW 4789/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Programme for Government contains a commitment to deliver 8000 new social and affordable homes over the next 4 years. A specific programme to deliver these is now being finalised.

Affordable Homes

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many affordable homes he expects to be delivered in each of the next four years.

(AQW 4790/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As noted in my answer to your previous question (AQW 4789/11-15), the Programme for Government commits us to building 8000 new social and affordable homes over the next 4 years. A specific programme for both social and affordable is still being finalised.

Business Improvement Districts

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made in bringing forward enabling legislation to permit the introduction of business improvement districts and allow local councils to facilitate and contribute to them.

(AQW 4915/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department concluded its consultation on proposals for BIDs legislation in Northern Ireland earlier this year and it is clear from the responses received that there is overwhelming support for the introduction of BIDs here.

I received Executive agreement on 24th November to proceed to draft the necessary Primary legislation and I plan to have this in place next year. The legislation will set out the broad parameters for BIDs, including the role of local councils in the arrangements. This will be followed by secondary legislation and guidance from the Department.

Social Housing: Properties

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of social housing properties (i) completed in each of the last three years; and (ii) that will be completed in each of the next three years.

(AQW 4950/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Over the last 3 years my Department has completed a total of 4278 social homes.

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Completions	1365	1504	1409

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to deliver 8000 new social and affordable homes over the next 4 years. A specific programme to deliver these is currently being finalised.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the rate of Disability Living Allowance granted to people who have had a ventriculoperitoneal shunting procedure in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5222/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not record information on medical procedures for customers in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

Disability Living Allowance consists of two separate components, Care and Mobility. The Care component can be awarded at 3 rates (Highest, Middle or Lower) and the Mobility component can be awarded at 2 rates (Higher or Lower). Some people will be entitled to receive just one component; others may get both depending on how the disability affects them.

The weekly rates of Disability Living Allowance for the last 3 years are listed in the table below.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Highest Rate Care component	£67.00	£70.35	£71.40
Middle Rate Care component	£44.85	£47.10	£47.80
Lowest Rate Care component	£17.75	£18.65	£18.95
Higher Rate Mobility Component	£46.75	£49.10	£49.85
Lower Rate Mobility Component	£17.75	£18.05	£18.95

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 9 December 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Social Investment Fund

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what formal notice was given to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister about the launch of the consultation on the Social Investment Fund on 27 September 2011. **(AQO 491/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): After agreeing the Social Investment Fund (SIF) consultation document, we wrote to the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee on 27 September providing a copy of the document and inviting comments as part of the consultation process.

We organised the sectoral consultation launch in order to publicise the start of the consultation period as we have also been dealing with a significant number of enquiries from the voluntary and community sector.

Our officials have since briefed the OFMDFM Committee in more detail on the SIF prior to the undertaking of consultation events. The Committee received a full schedule of the public consultation events and were advised of their commencement on 26 October 2011. Officials have also undertaken to update the Committee during the consultation process.

Invites to the sectoral consultation launch event were issued, on OFMDFM's behalf, by NICVA and were to be members of the Ministerial led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum. Information about the launch had, however, been circulated wider than the Forum.

Historical Institutional Abuse

Mr Doherty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse. **(AQO 498/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following consultations with victims and survivors over the summer and considering the recommendations of an interdepartmental taskforce, we called a special Executive meeting to agree on establishing an inquiry and investigation into institutional abuse, over the period 1945 to 1995.

We are currently considering potential legislative options which will provide the necessary statutory powers to the Inquiry, to enable the Chairperson to call for and compel any person or document, as required to be made available to the Inquiry.

Victims and survivors will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences to the Inquiry within the confidential environment of an independent acknowledgement forum. This should be established early in the New Year.

The Inquiry and investigation will conclude within a 2½ year period from the commencement date and the chairperson will be required to provide a report to the Executive within 6 months of its conclusion.

We have also committed to establishing an Advocates Service that will provide support to victims and survivors before, during and after the Inquiry.

Work is well underway to progress all of the aspects of this work and we continue to liaise with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse in relation to their needs and the steps that we are taking.

Whilst we work towards full implementation of the Inquiry and Advocacy Service we are conscious to ensure the needs of victims and survivors are catered for in the short term. We have instructed officials to explore ways in which an interim support service can be provided and we expect to be in a position to confirm these arrangements shortly.

St Andrews Review of North/South Implementation Bodies and Areas of Co-operation

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of whether the first term of reference of the St Andrews Review into North-South Implementation Bodies and Areas of Co-operation, embraces the option of reducing the number of bodies; and whether this option is being considered as part of the Review. **(AQW 3228/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As the First Minister advised you in response to your question on this matter in the Assembly on 10 October, the first Term of Reference of the St Andrews Review will make recommendations to the North South Ministerial Council concerning the North/South implementation bodies. No decisions have yet been taken on this part of the Review.

Shackleton Army Barracks, Ballykelly

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) what plans there are to decontaminate the site of the former army barracks at Ballykelly; and (ii) whether financial resources are available to complete the process within a given timescale. **(AQW 3405/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The need for and extent of decontamination in the future depends on the nature of any contamination present and the use that is made of the site. Work is currently underway to examine the options for this site.

Mutually Beneficial Savings: Republic of Ireland

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the discussions that have taken place with An Taoiseach in relation to identifying any potential for mutually beneficial savings by reducing duplication or overlapping expenditure; (ii) what progress has been made in relation to this matter; and (iii) what areas have been considered for joint collaboration. **(AQW 3894/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary meeting in November 2011, we had a discussion with the Taoiseach about a range of common challenges including constraints on budgets in both jurisdictions. In that context, the advantages of practical co-operation and the need to identify potential cost savings through working together were recognised. It was noted that discussions on this between Finance Ministers would continue.

Shackleton Army Barracks, Ballykelly

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether they are aware that it cost approximately £5 million to decontaminate the Fort George site; (ii) for an update on their proprietorship of the Shackleton army barracks at Ballykelly; and (iii) to detail the total estimated cost of decontaminating the site of the Shackleton army barracks at Ballykelly. **(AQW 3965/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Fort George site is the responsibility of the Minister for Social Development. Our officials are in regular liaison with their counterparts in the Department for Social Development through our joint ownership of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company, which has specific responsibility to manage and re-develop the two former military bases of Ebrington and Fort George. Decontamination works for Fort George are about to go out to tender which will determine the actual costs that will be incurred.

Expert advice is being obtained on the options for the Shackleton site and we will consider the way forward on the basis of this in due course. In the meantime, our officials are working to ensure that the site is responsibly managed and that holding costs are kept to a minimum.

The extent of decontamination needed to ensure planning approval for any redevelopment at Shackleton will ultimately depend on the end uses to which the site is put, including the disposal of parts or all of the site.

Funded Groups

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why only one of the groups from the victims sector and none of the ex-prisoner groups funded by their Department has been audited in the last three years. **(AQW 4174/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Over the past three years, a total of seven groups from the victims sector have been audited.

A specific programme of audit of victims organisations was commissioned by the Community Relations Council in response to concerns about governance issues in the sector. Further audit work has subsequently been carried out across a range of organisations funded by OFMDFM and its arm's length bodies. All organisations funded by OFMDFM are subject to monitoring and verification requirements on an ongoing basis.

Community Relations Council

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) how many times the First Minister's Private Secretary has contacted the Community Relations Council to express concerns about the use of funding provided by their Department; and (ii) the groups and concerns raised in each case. **(AQW 4175/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister's Private Secretary has never contacted the Community Relations Council to express concerns about the use of funding provided by their Department.

Community Relations Council

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it was within the First Minister's Principal Private Secretary's official duties to make contact with the Community Relations Council on 18 February 2010 regarding the content of a victims' group website.

(AQW 4233/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Yes.

Social Investment Fund

Mrs Dobson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the funding that will be allocated to the Social Investment Fund in each year between 2011 and 2015.

(AQO 733/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: £72 million of SIF is profiled in years 2, 3 and 4 of this CSR period and therefore cannot be spent in this financial year.

We are committed that the SIF will remain an £80 million fund. Therefore the Executive has agreed to re-profile at least £7 million of the spend available in year 1, into years 2, 3 and 4 to ensure more effective spend against area based plans.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress and development work that has been carried to ensure publication of the Sexual Orientation Strategy in early 2012.

(AQO 734/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials are to meet with stakeholders, with organisations from the sector and with other departments. Draft proposals to develop the Strategy will then be made available to the OFMDFM Committee.

We are aiming for the public consultation process to take place in early 2012 with a view to publishing a Sexual Orientation Strategy later next year.

Historical Institutional Abuse: Inquiry

Mr P Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse.

(AQO 735/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following consultations with victims and survivors over the summer and considering the recommendations of an interdepartmental taskforce, we called a special Executive meeting to agree on establishing an inquiry and investigation into institutional abuse, over the period 1945 to 1995.

We are currently considering potential legislative options which will provide the necessary statutory powers to the Inquiry, to enable the Chairperson to call for and compel any person or document, as required to be made available to the Inquiry.

Victims and survivors will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences to the Inquiry within the confidential environment of an independent acknowledgement forum. This should be established early in the New Year.

The Inquiry and investigation will conclude within a 2½ year period from the commencement date and the chairperson will be required to provide a report to the Executive within 6 months of its conclusion.

We have also committed to establishing an Advocates Service that will provide support to victims and survivors before, during and after the Inquiry.

Work is well underway to progress all of the aspects of this work and we continue to liaise with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse in relation to their needs and the steps that we are taking.

Whilst we work towards full implementation of the Inquiry and Advocacy Service we are conscious to ensure the needs of victims and survivors are catered for in the short term. We have instructed officials to explore ways in which an interim support service can be provided and we expect to be in a position to confirm these arrangements shortly.

Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how their Department intends to engage with, and involve, children and young people and the children's sector to develop the action plan for the implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-2016.

(AQW 4765/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Junior Ministers and officials have been liaising with key stakeholders in the sector and shall continue to do so.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister established Participation Network to actively seek and record the opinions of our children and young people and will continue to use this as a means to engage with children and young people throughout the development of the action plan.

Printing of Departmental Documents

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the date and time of when the (i) Draft Programme for Government; (ii) Investment Strategy; and (iii) Economic Strategy was (a) sent to the printer; (b) printed; and (c) received from the printer.

(AQW 4773/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following agreement of the documents at the Executive meeting that commenced at 7.00pm on Wednesday evening 16 November, the Draft Programme for Government and Economic Strategy were sent to the printer at 2am on Thursday 17 November; the printing proofs were signed off at 3am when print was initiated and the finished job collected at 9am. The documents were delivered to Parliament Buildings at 9.50am on Thursday 17 November. The Investment Strategy was handed to the printer at 1.55am on Thursday 17 November, the printing proofs were signed off at 3am when print was initiated, the finished job collected at 8.30am and delivered to Parliament Buildings at 9.10am on Thursday 17 November.

Diamond Jubilee

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans are being made to celebrate Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee.

(AQW 4775/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) is the lead Department in relation to UK-wide events to mark the occasion. The celebrations will centre around an extended weekend in 2012 on 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th June. Details of these plans can be found at http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/diamondjubilee.aspx.

In line with DCMS advice, it will be for individual organisations and administrations to determine how they wish to mark the occasion, with a caveat that they should reflect the current economic climate, should be funded from their own budgets or sponsorship and not be extravagant.

Poverty Outcome Model

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Poverty Outcome Model will be published.

(AQW 4782/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: During the third meeting of the re-established Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum, which took place on 27 October 2011, members considered a draft version of an Outcomes Model to drive progress of the Plan towards eradicating child poverty here.

Some further development work will now be undertaken by the Junior Ministers, departmental officials and stakeholders in advance of a draft Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan being issued for public consultation.

OFMDFM: Sport

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding their Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4810/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: While OFMDFM has not provided funding directly for the development or promotion of any of the sports listed, the Department has provided funding for the promotion of good relations to two initiatives involving football (soccer), as detailed below.

Funding Provided 2008	Funding Provided 2009	Funding Provided 2010	Comments
£131,285 (This equates to 25% OFMDFM funding towards overall project total of £525,140.00 under Peace III Programme)	Nil	Nil	<p>"Football for all" started in 2000 and aims to improve good relations at I.F.A. and work at local and international level with clubs and fans to eradicate sectarianism and remove barriers to involvement in football, increasing participation from minority groups and working at Irish League level to eradicate sectarianism and promote good relations.</p> <p>The project was to oversee and organise training and support for clubs in their own communities. Building on the foundations of all cultures playing, supporting, training and coaching football together.</p> <p>The project promoter aimed to create an inclusive culture within the sport of football, where everyone can feel safe and secure enjoying the sport.</p>

Funding Provided 2008	Funding Provided 2009	Funding Provided 2010	Comments
Nil	Nil	£4,038 Cohesion Sharing and Integration / North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme	The "Engaging through sport" programme is a north Belfast wide initiative managed by Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership as part of the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme which is funded by OFMDFM. The programme involves the provision of shared training for volunteers from football clubs throughout North Belfast which is delivered on cross-community basis. The relationships developed during this training lead to the delivery of two cross-community football competitions involving children from across North Belfast.

Child Poverty Strategy

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the outcomes model, currently being developed for the Child Poverty Strategy, will contribute to the delivery of the six high level outcomes of the Children and Young People's Strategy.
(AQW 4813/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Whilst the outcomes model has been developed with a focus on delivering the Child Poverty Strategy, it is clear that the eradication of child poverty will make a substantial contribution to delivering the six high level outcomes in the Children and Young People's Strategy.

In focusing on measureable outcomes the model will assist departments and other public agencies in targeting resources at those actions which have most impact on reducing poverty and creating the circumstances in which the outcomes sought across the six high level areas can be delivered.

Both the Child Poverty Strategy and the Children and Young People's Strategy are mutually supportive.

Some further development work is currently being carried out on both the outcomes model and the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan in advance of the Plan being issued for public consultation.

Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan will relate to the Children and Young People's Strategy Action Plan.
(AQW 4815/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We recognise that poverty can act as a barrier for children and young people to achieve everything they aspire to and if we are to deliver the aims of the overarching 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People, then child poverty is a fundamental issue which the Executive remains committed to addressing.

To contribute to fulfilling the objectives of our Children and Young People's Strategy and particularly the economic and environmental well-being outcome, the Child Poverty Strategy and its associated Action Plan will improve the lives of children and young people and their families through the eradication of child poverty here.

Actions contained within the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan, which is currently being developed, will link to both the objectives and targets of our 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People and the objectives and goals of our overarching Anti-Poverty Strategy "Lifetime Opportunities".

Draft Programme for Government

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they plan to organise public meetings as part of the consultation process on the draft Programme for Government.
(AQW 5020/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As part of the consultation process, a series of public meetings will be held across Northern Ireland to introduce the Programme for Government and canvass views from attendees. The consultation process will continue until 22 February 2012.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 721/11-15, (i) whether the £12m, allocated to the development of a Childcare Strategy and for projects that will improve childcare infrastructure, will be spent by the end of this budgetary period; (ii) whether any funds not allocated by the end of 2011/12 will be re-profiled over years 2, 3 and 4; (iii) to detail the bids that have been submitted by Departments for this funding; and (iv) to detail the projects that have been successful, including the costings attached to the projects.
(AQW 5080/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive has recognised the importance of accessible, affordable, good quality childcare for children, families and the economy and, for that reason, has allocated an additional £12 million to developing a childcare strategy to deliver universal, sustainable and affordable childcare.

Junior Ministers are leading the development of the childcare strategy, and officials and advisers are engaged in discussions with the key departments involved. It will be important to secure clarity and agreement on how best to improve childcare provision, as well as policy lead responsibilities, and partnership working arrangements. We plan to put proposals on the development of the Childcare Strategy to the Executive early in the New Year.

The childcare fund will operate as an executive fund requiring departments to bid to OFMDFM to be allocated funding. We are currently working with departments in relation to bids.

We are fully considering all options, including asking the Executive to ring-fence, in light of the discussions with key departments.

It is important to underline that the £12m is additional funding for the development of the childcare strategy, which will not replace existing baseline provision for the delivery of childcare services.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Local Action Groups: Unspent Funds

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the amount of funding that will go unspent this year by each of the Local Action Groups; and to detail any unspent funds by the Local Action Groups in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3471/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The table below details the targets for spend as set by the Local Action Groups in their annual implementation plans, their actual spend and the variance between the two figures. There was no spend before 09/10.

		GROW	NER	LRP	DRAP	SOAR	ARC	SWARD
2009/10	Target	518,202	437,750	152,908	155,000	135,000	420,000	1,780,000
	Actual	222,319	378,590	22,800	34,434	144,820	124,025	777,649
	Variance	295,883	59,160	130,018	120,566	-9,820	295,975	1,002,351
2010/11	Target	1,347,210	2,049,365	786,840	1,796,571	2,200,000	3,199,999	2,570,975
	Actual	589,597	1,303,281	483,773	850,317	873,028	1,066,205	1,132,587
	Variance	757,613	746,084	303,067	946,254	1,326,972	2,133,794	1,438,388
2011/12	Target	856,575	1,050,500	502,842	861,933	1,440,525	1,428,462	1,741,228
	Actual	301,318	303,648	130,936	502,329	373,065	862,788	1,032,103
	Variance	555,257	746,852	371,906	359,604	1,067,460	565,674	709,125

Spend and targets for 2011/12 are from 1 April to 30 November 2011

Rural Development Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total budget committed to date for the Rural Development Programme in the (i) North East Cluster; (ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West Cluster; (iii) South West Action Rural Development Cluster; (iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas Cluster; (v) Down Rural Area Partnership Cluster; (vi) Grow South Antrim Cluster; and (vii) Lagan Rural Partnership.

(AQW 4566/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have interpreted committed to mean Letters of Offer (LOO) issued and accepted plus applications approved by JCC/LAG following a LAG assessment panel that are currently waiting for the LOO to be drafted.

To date the amount committed for Axis 3 of the NIRD is as follows:-

(i) North East Region	£3,796,373
(ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West	£9,679,106
(iii) South West Action Rural Development	£9,820,042
(iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas	£7,059,210
(v) Down Rural Area Partnership	£3,944,376
(vi) Grow South Antrim	£3,141,373
(vii) Lagan Rural Partnership	£2,466,419

Rural Development Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total budget yet to be committed for the Rural Development Programme in the (i) North East Cluster; (ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West Cluster; (iii) South West Action Rural Development Cluster; (iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas Cluster; (v) Down Rural Area Partnership Cluster; (vi) Grow South Antrim Cluster; and (vii) Lagan Rural Partnership, for 2007-2013.

(AQW 4567/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The total budget allocated that has yet to be committed for each cluster in respect of Axis 3 of the NIRDP 2007-2013 is as follows:-

(i) North East Region	£9,384,927
(ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West	£8,805,006
(iii) South West Action Rural Development	£10,702,185
(iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas	£9,672,629
(v) Down Rural Area Partnership	£9,553,690
(vi) Grow South Antrim	£5,749,526
(vii) Lagan Rural Partnership	£6,225,137

Additionally there are some 608 applications worth a potential £37 million going through the assessment process.

DARD: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the public appointments both she and her predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4747/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A list of public appointments, including re-appointments, which I and my predecessor have made since May 2007 is attached.

Headquarters: DARD

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the relocation of her Department's headquarters.

(AQW 4904/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In line with the Draft Programme for Government, I remain fully committed to the relocation of the DARD headquarters to somewhere outside of Greater Belfast.

This project is subject to the Executives appraisal and business case processes. My Department has now received approval from DFP in respect of the Strategic Outline Case and my officials are now developing an Outline Business Case – another necessary component in a project of this size.

To date, no decision has been taken as yet on where the proposed new HARD HQ will be located. These and other matters will be for the business cases to consider and address at the appropriate time.

De Minimis

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what representations she has made to the EU for an uplift in the current ceiling of de minimis aid, of 7,500 euros over three years, which can be offered to agricultural businesses, compared with the ceiling applicable to other sectors of 200,000 euros over three years.

(AQW 4906/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The current €7,500 ceiling for de minimis aid to businesses active in the primary production of agricultural products is set by Commission Regulation (EC) 1535/2007. This Regulation will continue to apply to 31 December 2013. The European Commission has not yet published its proposals for, or sought Member State views on, the new regulation which will come into force from 1 January 2014. My officials are in liaison with Defra to ensure the Department has the opportunity to consider and respond to all proposals brought forward by the Commission once these are known.

Field Mapping Exercise

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the cost to date; and (ii) the projected final cost of the field mapping exercise.

(AQW 4907/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funds to support the field mapping exercise were secured from the Invest to Save initiative.

To date, £ 7.627 million has been expended on the mapping exercise.

At this stage it is projected that the exercise will be completed in 2012/13 and will cost £18.945m in total.

Beef: Traceability

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the differences between the quality assurance and traceability of Northern Ireland beef and beef from the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 4946/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the north, quality assurance of beef is provided for via the NI Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIFQAS). The scheme is owned by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) and is funded by way of a voluntary industry levy. In the south, it is the Beef Quality Assurance Scheme (BQAS) which is also an industry funded scheme, provided through Bord Bia.

In relation to differences between these quality assurance schemes, the NIFQAS requires cattle to have adhered to a 90 consecutive day residency period on quality assured farm/farms prior to slaughter, while BQAS requires cattle to have adhered to a 70 day residency period.

There is also some variation between the schemes' certification requirements and also between standards with regards to environmental care aspects and animal traceability, identification and records.

While there are some differences between both schemes, it should be noted that the principles behind both quality assurance schemes are the same, with both setting out requirements for best practice in beef and lamb production. Both schemes are also accredited to EN45011, which is the standard for the European accreditation of bodies who are involved in certification of the various scheme requirements.

In relation to cattle traceability, systems in place both north and south are based on Regulation (EC) 1760/2000. The main elements of the systems are therefore similar and include identification of animals by the application of approved ear-tags; notifications of births, deaths and movements; up-to-date on-farm herd registers; and a computerised database operated by the competent authority.

The main differences between the two systems are as follows: herd-owners must apply two identically numbered yellow plastic ear-tags to calves within twenty days of birth. Herd-owners in the south order ear-tags directly from the single tag supplier approved by the DAFM, whereas herd-owners in the north may order tags from a list of tag suppliers approved by DARD.

In the south, when a herd-owner registers a calf birth, the Calf Birth Registration Agency issues the herd-owner with a passport for the animal. This passport must accompany the animal each time it is moved, and all movements of the animal throughout its life must be recorded on the passport. In the south, a herd-owner must obtain a Certificate of Compliance before moving an animal to another farm. This Certificate is validated by data held on DAFM's databases and verifies the status, origin and identification of the animal prior to the movement taking place. In the north, cattle passports are only issued if the animal is being moved out of the north. Animals moving within the north are instead accompanied during movement by a movement document completed by each herd-owner.

Beef: Promotion

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the steps her Department is taking to promote the marketability and competitiveness of Northern Ireland beef in the domestic and international markets.

(AQW 4949/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From the outset I should make it clear that EU State Aid Rules preclude Government from promoting local produce based on origin.

Locally, the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) is responsible for the promotion of red meat and manages the Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, as well as school cookery demonstrations and retail sampling. Invest NI is responsible for the international marketing of local produce and, together with local companies, attend international events such as the red meat trade fair in SIAL, France and Anuga, Germany, where an agreement was signed to promote red meat from the north in the French and Belgian markets.

It is important to help farmers develop strong and profitable relationships with their supply chain partners and my Department proactively facilitates such communication through various supply chain initiatives. Further support is available to the sector through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) to help develop innovative products, while scientific research support is available through AFBI.

The Red Meat Strategic Forum, which is chaired by the LMC and includes industry stakeholders, meets to look at strategic issues of importance to the red meat sector. These include exploring export certification issues with the relevant authorities in important third country markets such as South Africa and progress being made on accessing other priority markets such as China and Russia.

You will be aware that the Executive recently included a commitment for the agri-food sector in the draft Programme for Government (PfG). This is a positive development and recognises the importance of the sector to the economy. In pursuit of this PfG commitment, I am working with the DETI Minister to establish a Food Strategy Board, which will largely be comprised of industry representatives and whose role will be to develop a longer-term strategy for the sector. It will be important for the beef sector to be involved in this process as it accounts for a significant proportion of the farming industry in the north.

Rivers Agency

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the cost to her Department of sending a representative from the Rivers Agency to attend an evening council meeting.

(AQW 4965/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The cost is relatively modest and would vary widely however in my view cost is not the issue. Currently my officials have to balance the ongoing operational response to recent flooding with requests from the public and their representatives for meetings and site visits. My Rivers Agency officials have been of course making every effort to work with and facilitate the needs of Councils in so far they can. The current demands of repair and recovery works in response to the recent flood events are still very high and I am acutely aware of the considerable efforts of my Rivers Agency officials in responding to the many demands placed on them at this time.

Assisted Rural Travel Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to extend the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme beyond the end of this financial year.

(AQW 4967/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD in conjunction with the Department of Regional Development (DRD), the department with responsibility for administering the Rural Transport Fund here, introduced the pilot Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) on the 01 December 2009 with funding now in place until the end of this financial year.

A joint departmental evaluation of the pilot scheme has commenced and once completed will enable an informed decision to be reached by DRD and DARD on the way forward.

I recognise the positive impact that this Assisted Rural Travel Scheme has made on the lives of rural dwellers and how it has helped to address issues of rural social exclusion and isolation. As you will be aware the draft Programme for Government contains a commitment to tackle rural poverty and isolation through a £13 million package of funding and I believe that initiatives that address transport and access, such as ARTS, are key to this.

DARD: Staff Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 4970/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The cost of staff mileage claims for my department in 2010/11 was £2,342,028 and in 2009/10 was £2,540,990.

DARD's mileage costs arise from our operational needs in meeting legislative requirements and providing a service to the rural community and the wider public. By the very nature of the work of the Department this involves staff travelling widely in rural areas during the course of their duties, for example the Department's inspectors visit meat processing plants, and thousands of farms each year.

It should be noted that Departmental mileage is paid at rates which are set NICS wide. My view is that mileage figures across the NICS are still too high, particularly in the light of the current economic climate, therefore I am in discussions with my officials to see where additional mileage savings could be made.

Single Farm Payments

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in the negotiations on the reform of the Single Farm Payment element of the Common Agricultural Policy.

(AQW 4989/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The formal negotiations on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2013 are now underway with the publication of legislative proposals on 12 October 2011. Currently, I am consulting with stakeholders with a view to informing my position for the negotiations ahead.

The negotiations are expected to continue until at least the end of 2012, but I have already taken steps to exert an influence. This included attending the October and the November EU Agriculture Council meetings, which marked the beginning of the formal consideration of the proposals. I, along with Agriculture Ministers from Defra, Scotland and Wales have also met Commissioner Dacian Cioloş and was able to raise concerns with him about 'greening' and implementing the 'active' farmer test. Other important issues were discussed including the need for an equitable share of Pillar II funding, simplification and transitional arrangements in moving to a flat rate. These discussions were useful, but we are at an early stage of the CAP reform process and more needs to be done in order to obtain the necessary improvements to the reform proposals. It is fair to say that the initial reactions to the CAP reform proposals have been negative across the EU. However, the Commission are in stock taking mode and are unlikely to make any significant changes to their proposals until much later in the negotiations.

I am building a good relationship with my counterpart in the south of Ireland, Simon Coveney TD. The CAP reform proposals will continue to be discussed at the North South Ministerial Council and there is every possibility that the final reform negotiations in Europe will take place during Ireland's Presidency of the EU.

I have also held a number of meetings with Defra, Scottish and Welsh Ministers to discuss the reform proposals. The EU Parliament will have a co-decision role in the CAP reform process and so I will also be working with our MEP's from both the north and the south as I seek to use every avenue open to me in getting the best deal possible from the CAP negotiations.

All of the above interactions are replicated at official level, with detailed views being fed through Defra to the EU Council Working Groups as we push our case on all fronts.

Common Fisheries Policy

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in the negotiations on the reform of the regionalisation of fisheries in the Common Fisheries Policy.

(AQW 4990/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following the announcement of the Commission's CFP proposals the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in July afforded Member States the first opportunity to give their initial reaction. There was a further discussion about the external dimension of the CFP at Council on 14th November. There has been a detailed examination of the draft Regulations by officials at the "Expert Working Group" and written submissions made. There remains a lack of clarity from the Commission as to how the proposals for regionalisation, which includes the development of the multi-annual plans, will work in practice and the Commission is being pressed to provide further explanation. There have been no political negotiations yet on the Commission's proposals but these are expected to happen in the New Year.

Flooding: Altamuskin and Cloughfin

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will offer any assistance to people whose land and property was damaged by flooding from the Altamuskin and Cloughfin Rivers in October 2011.

(AQW 5001/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Rivers Agency has investigated the property flooding from the Altamuskin and Cloughfin Rivers during October 2011. Works have already been undertaken to remove blockages on the Cloughfin River which is maintained for drainage purposes at public expense. Further maintenance is planned for the Cloughfin River in the coming year. In addition a flood alleviation scheme for Beragh has been brought forward with construction to start in 2013/14.

Where any residents or landowners are concerned about a risk of flooding, I would advise them to contact the Rivers Agency office based at Omagh and also avail of the useful guidance published on NI Direct. Where residents are concerned there is an imminent risk of flooding they should contact the Flooding Incident Line on 0300 2000 100.

Rural Development Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the targeted spend under each of the six measures in Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme in the (i) North East Cluster; (ii) Assisting Rural Communities North West Cluster; (iii) South West Action Rural Development Cluster; (iv) Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas Cluster; (v) Down Rural Area Partnership Cluster; (vi) Grow South Antrim Cluster; and (vii) Lagan Rural Partnership during (a) 2010-11; and (b) 2011-12.

(AQW 5011/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Please see the two tables below that detail the information you requested.

(a) 2010/11 Targeted Spend from Implementation Plan updated June 2010

	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6
NER	453,125	660,000	325,000	389,238	130,000	92,002
ARC	1,200,000	799,999	500,000	350,000	50,000	300,000
SWARD	827,880	845,705	260,000	587,390	40,000	10,000
SOAR	300,000	1,000,000	400,000	200,000	250,000	50,000
DRAP	352,227	314,281	690,330	98,734	0	341,000
GROW	343,410	245,700	255,300	240,800	262,000	0
LRP	308,937	283,000	140,350	24,553	20,000	10,000
Total	3,785,579	4,148,685	2,570,980	1,890,715	752,000	803,002

(b) 2011/12 Targeted Spend from Implementation Plan updated June 2011

	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6
NER	460,385	451,755	490,750	380,000	323,776	105,000
ARC	641,559	502,319	320,792	1,339,379	0	262,845
SWARD	575,676	738,710	565,570	528,127	102,067	294,668

	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6
SOAR	363,750	309,015	713,972	641,514	159,915	15,372
DRAP	370,290	191,950	847,829	263,736	112,500	21,767
GROW	326,009	326,314	295,213	373,514	197,300	94,322
LRP	305,240	332,280	326,550	335,718	3,300	129,864
Total	3,042,909	2,852,343	3,560,676	3,861,988	898,858	923,838

Rural Development Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total amount allocated in her departmental budget for the each of the six measures in Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme in (i) 2010-11; and (ii) 2011-12.

(AQW 5014/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My department does not hold the Axis 3 budget at measure level but at an overall Axis 3 level. The detail of the project budgets for the years requested is shown below.

2010-11: The total project budget at the start of the year was £20.6m. Due to underspend and subsequent easements declared in Monitoring Rounds, the final project budget for 2010-11 was £11m.

2011-12: The total project budget at the start of the year was £21.8m. Due to underspend and subsequent easements declared in the October Monitoring Round, the project budget for 2011-12 currently stands at £15.5m.

Joint Research Centre

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department, in addition to engaging with the Joint Research Centre, has had any discussions with other EU Member States to learn about best practice with regards to the areas identified as being in need of improvement throughout the European Commission's audit and disallowance process.

(AQW 5030/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD is represented at most Joint Research Centre (JRC) Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) related events, where contact is made with a wide range of other Member States. Over and above these LPIS events, DARD actively engages with other EU Member State Paying Agencies through a number of different fora. The most prominent of these are:

- Learning network meetings involving representatives from a number of Member States including Spain, Netherlands, France, Denmark, Belgium, Germany and Poland. At these meetings, which exist to provide a platform for exchanging experiences and best practices, issues of mutual concern/interest are discussed and advice is subsequently presented to the Commission
- The bi-annual Director's of Paying Agency Conference and the bi-annual Panta Rhei Conference. These conferences are attended by representatives from all Member State Paying Agencies, the Commission and the European Court of Auditors and provide opportunities for networking and sharing of good practice, in the case of Panta Rhei with a particular focus on systems and information technology.
- A working group which consists of colleagues from the Netherlands, Flanders, Scotland, Denmark and Sweden. This working group focuses mainly on the requirement for each Member State to carry out an annual self assessment of the LPIS but also covers other technical LPIS related issues.
- As part of the project to introduce use of satellite imagery to contribute to inspection processes, DARD has engaged with other Member States including the south of Ireland, Denmark, France, Italy and Romania in regard to the methodology used.
- DARD has ongoing contact with colleagues in the south and also meets regularly with England, Scotland and Wales on SFP and LPIS related issues.

European Commission: Audit and Disallowance Process

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the extent and nature of the staff training which was provided, in the areas identified as being in need of improvement throughout the European Commission's audit and disallowance process, prior to the audit; and the staff training that has been provided subsequently.

(AQW 5035/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Training for staff carrying out mapping and field inspection duties has been enhanced.

Mapping

The work identified by the audit to address the inconsistency within the mapping is being carried out in conjunction with Land & Property Services (LPS), which is the National Mapping Agency for NI. The staff involved comprise LPS Mapping and Charting staff and Professional & Technical staff who are on loan to LPS from Planning Service. The senior LPS staff involved in this work are members of the Chartered Institute of Civil Engineering Surveyors, (CICES).

All staff have undergone four days formal training, covering the protocols and specifications for data collection and the software systems used within the capture process. Each team has been provided with additional training specific to their role. This is supervised by experienced Mapping and Charting staff with additional support provided by DARD Field Inspectors as required. Following initial training, staff undertake a minimum progress period of four weeks to ensure their work meets the quality and consistency standards required.

DARD staff checking the returned maps from LPS have received 5 days training in the use of specific software, the protocols and interpretation of the ortho photography. This was reinforced with further 2 days field visits to assist in the interpretation of the image with the actual land cover. Initially, to help standardise work, the same area was checked by each member of staff and differences were highlighted.

The majority of the quality assurance team have previously been involved in field inspections and hence have experience of the various ineligible features within fields. The assistance provided to LPS is ongoing.

The supervisors of this team carry out a further check of the quality assurance results. As common errors are identified, these are detailed at regular team meetings and shared with LPS.

Staff within DARD who carry out mapping updates are provided with a 4 day training course in map amendments. During 2011, these staff were provided with a 1 day refresher course in map amendment.

Field inspection

Inspectors are trained in the full range of skills and competences required to carry out and process inspections. This training is delivered in both formal sessions and 'on the job' development, with ongoing support from managers. In general terms, inspectors are trained in assessment of land eligibility for the relevant schemes, use of IT and other equipment to accurately capture and process inspection findings and health and safety.

In preparation for the 2011 inspection period, training for inspectors was considerably enhanced. Prior to this time, inspectors were provided with 1.5 days formal training and some 2-3 days informal training with regional managers, combined with ongoing support.

During 2011, each inspector received 5 days training on land eligibility. This training combined both background information sessions and 'hands on' field exercises. The training was bench marked against the standard information provided in the 'Guide to Land Eligibility' booklet, and inspectors were assessed on exercises carried out in the field. Information was also provided in line with guidance from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission. This training was carried out with inspectors in a single group in order to ensure consistency of practice across the region. Further training and mentoring was provided by managers in smaller groups in local areas. This activity provided further assurance of the knowledge and skills of inspectors and extended to an average of a further 2 days training per inspector.

All inspectors must undertake a 4 day training course in the use of geospatial measuring equipment. This equipment, incorporating a state of the art Global Positioning System (GPS) linked to ruggedized computers, provides a fair and accurate measure of eligible features at inspection. This training was benchmarked through the use of an external delivery company, and is enhanced by regular updates according to the ongoing development of enhanced features. IT support is provided on an ongoing basis by IT specialists and managers in the field.

As part of an ongoing programme of Health and Safety training, each inspector received a 1 day refresher training course in order to comply with statutory requirements and provide a safe working environment for both the inspector and the farmer.

The success of this extensive training programme is gauged through a process of re-performance assessments of inspections by managers. This year, this re-performance assessment is part of an audit of all aspects of the SFP processes in a European Commission exercise called an audit of Legality and Regularity. The NI Audit Office are undertaking this audit on behalf of the National Audit Office and the results of this exercise, which is ongoing, must be provided to the EC by September 2012.

European Commission: Audit and Disallowance Process

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development against what standard the training provided to employees, in the areas identified as being in need of improvement throughout the European Commission's audit and disallowance process, was bench-marked.

(AQW 5036/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to AQW 5035/11-15.

European Commission: Audit and Disallowance Process

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measurable outcomes her Department uses to ascertain the success of training initiatives which were delivered to employees in the areas identified as being in need of improvement throughout the European Commission's audit and disallowance process.

(AQW 5040/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to AQW 5035/11-15.

Fishing Quota

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the sustainability of the current fishing quota; and on what research this assessment is based.

(AQW 5108/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My assessment of the sustainability of the Total Allowable Catches (TACs) available to our fishing fleet is based mainly on the stock assessments published by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). This may be supplemented by additional research on certain stocks that is undertaken by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. The state of the stocks fished by our fleet varies but examples for the main stocks are as follows. Nephrops, which is our main stock, is fished sustainably with fishing mortality lower than the Maximum Sustainable Yield mortality level in the Irish Sea. For Irish Sea herring, ICES has not been able to carry out a full analytical stock assessment but acknowledges substantial acoustic survey estimates carried out for a number of years by AFBI that show upward trends in spawning stock biomass and falling fishing mortality rates. ICES recommends that catches should not increase and this suggests that the current TAC is sustainable. The Irish Sea cod stock remains below precautionary limits. Fishing mortality is uncertain and total mortality remains high. A Cod Recovery Plan is in operation which provides for annual decreases in fishing effort and TAC until the stock recovers.

Woodland Creation and Forestry Protection

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why woodland creation or forestry protection is not mentioned in the draft Programme for Government.

(AQW 5205/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The draft Programme for Government is an Executive document containing high level commitments from all Departments. Although forestry measures are not named in the draft Programme, they will appear in Forest Service business plans that support the Executive's Programme. In that context, Priority 1: Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future, contains building blocks which include the Rural Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Strategy. Both the Plan and the Strategy make provision for woodland creation and forest protection measures.

Forestry Expansion Targets

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department's commitment to reviewing forestry expansion targets in the forestry business plan still stands.

(AQW 5206/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The commitment given in the Forest Service Business Plan 2011/12 to develop proposals for new mechanisms to support woodland creation still stands. These proposals will be included within the wider ranging review of support arrangements for private planting which I announced in Assembly Question Oral AQO 782/11-15. This review will report in time to feed into the Department's consideration of the proposed Rural Development Programme.

Woodland Creation Review Group

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the organisations that will be included in the woodland creation review group.

(AQW 5208/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Forest Service will involve the following organisations in the review, as members of the Woodland Creation Stakeholder Group. These are: ConFor (Confederation of Forest Industries); DARD's Countryside Management Branch; Council for Nature Conservation & the Countryside; Farm Woodlands Ltd; NI Environment Agency; Premier Woodlands Ltd; Rural Generation Ltd; Scottish Woodlands Ltd; Ulster Farmers Union; and the Woodland Trust.

Forest Service: Review of Support Arrangements for Private Planting

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the scope and scale of the Forest Service's review of support arrangements for private planting; and the timescale of the review.

(AQW 5248/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The primary focus of the review is to explore mechanisms which will lead to an increase in private planting and to provide the social benefits of these new forests. It also needs to highlight the level of demand for planting by farmers and other landowners, and how to influence this demand.

I met representatives recently from the private forestry sector and they gave me a number of ideas to increase planting, including greater equality of payment rates between lowland and Less Favoured Areas, improving the financial encouragement for farmers and landowners to take part in planting programmes, and increasing the scope of planting to alleviate flooding risks. I will develop these ideas, and taking account of barriers and opportunities available within the new Rural Development regulation, develop formal terms of reference in consultation with the Woodland Creation Stakeholders group and the ARD Committee early in the New Year. The review will report in time to feed into the Department's consideration of the proposed Rural Development Programme.

Rural Crime

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the public perception that rural crime is increasing, whether her Department has any plans to enter into discussions with the PSNI to ensure that such crime is recorded and classified in the clearest possible manner.

(AQW 5254/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials wrote to the PSNI who stated that they do not hold specific statistics in relation to rural crime. They indicated that currently crime is recorded in line with National Recording Standards irrespective of where it occurs and therefore they cannot extract data on crimes which occur in rural areas.

I will be meeting with the Chief Constable shortly and will raise this issue with him at that meeting.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the percentage decrease in the number of Bovine Tuberculosis cases in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5359/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of animals that have been removed as TB reactors in each of the years from 2006 and 2010 and the percentage change on the previous year is shown below

Year	Number of reactors removed	Percentage change on previous year
2006	9383	10.4%
2007	7299	22.2 %
2008	8390	+ 14.9 %
2009	8198	2.3 %
2010	6404	21.8 %

Overall the percentage change from 2005 to 2010 inclusive was a decrease of 38.8%.

Headquarters: DARD

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration has been given to relocating her Department's headquarters to the Omagh area.

(AQW 5361/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date, no decision has been taken on where the proposed new DARD HQ will be located. The entire project is subject to the Executives appraisal and business case processes. My Department has now received approval from DFP in respect of the Strategic Outline Case and my officials are now developing an Outline Business Case – another necessary component in a project of this size.

In line with the Draft Programme for Government, I remain fully committed to the relocation of the DARD headquarters to somewhere outside of Greater Belfast.

Local Action Groups and Joint Council Committees

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the purpose of the meeting on 6 December with Local Action Groups and Joint Council Committees; who has been invited to the meeting; and to provide details of the agenda and whether the Department will make any announcement following the meeting.

(AQW 5398/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The purpose of the meeting is to agree ways to direct funds to rural businesses and the rural community more quickly and in a more strategic way. Also to target rural Broadband provision more effectively both through the Rural Development Programme and by using DARD funds from her Tackling Poverty initiative and delivery of this will be assessed over the next number of months.

The chairperson or nominated representative from each Joint Council Committee and Local Action Group plus the Chief Executive of each lead Administrative Council has been invited to attend the meeting.

A press statement will issue immediately after the meeting.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Illegal Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the length of illegal nets found; (ii) the species found in illegal nets; and (iii) the number of each species found in illegal nets, in Lough Neagh in each month in the last three years. **(AQW 5140/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

2009

Month	Length of Net yds	Number and species of fish
Jan 2009	400	300 Roach
Mar 2009	1300	Old net fish decomposed
April 2009	1700	2300 mixed coarse fish
May 2009	500	20 mixed coarse fish
Aug 2009	500	Old net fish decomposed
Oct 2009	4900	600 Pollen / 24 Trout / 3400 Roach

2010

Jan 2010	500	350 Pollen / 150 Roach
Feb 2010	1000	400 Pollen / 1200 Roach
Mar 2010	4900	6801 Pollen / 2743 Roach / 330 Perch / 20 Bream
May 2010	1950	1316 Pollen / 39 Trout / 531 Roach / 143 Perch
Jun 2010	1100	Old net fish decomposed
Jul 2010	1112	21 Pollen / 1 Trout / 350 Roach / decomposed fish
Aug 2010	450	50 Bream
Oct 2010	2300	600 Pollen / 15 Trout / 1100 Roach / 700 Perch
Nov 2010	700	80 Bream
Dec 2010	700	2 Pollen / 40 Trout / 1099 Roach / 9 Perch / 35 Bream

2011

Jan 2011	8639	6500 Roach / 700 Pollen / 40 Trout
Feb 2011	2883	1000 Bream
Mar 2011	6109	1700 Pollen / 235 Trout / 1200 Roach / 80 Perch / 140 Bream
Apr 2011	1200	150 Pollen / 25 Trout / 1000 Roach / 150 Perch
May 2011	800	450 Roach / 50 Perch
Jun 2011	6200	4300 Pollen / 99 Trout / 200 Roach / 22 Perch

The numbers of trout recovered from nets are accurately counted and the numbers of coarse fish are estimated.

River Maine, Randalstown

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the annual results from the fish pass counter at Randalstown on the River Maine, for each of the last five years. **(AQW 5182/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below details the adult salmon counts from the monitored fish pass counter at Randalstown on the River Maine for each of the last five years.

River	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Maine ¹	179	479	548	333	296

1. The River Main counter represents a partial count.

These figures are one of a number of data sets used to establish the percentage compliance with the Conservation Limit for the river.

River Maine, Randalstown

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1304/11-15, to list the monitoring sites on the River Maine.

(AQW 5183/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The list includes tributaries of the River Maine

Site_No_	River	4 Digit Grid_ref
1	Kells	2926 9948
2	Kells	2874 9955
3	Kells	2813 9974
4	Kells	2744 9966
5	Kells	2724 9944
6	Kells	2676 9902
7	Kells	2659 9876
8	Kells	2612 9849
9	Kells	2570 9818
10	Kells	2519 9816
11	Kells	2481 9838
12	Kells	2393 9845
13	Kells	2356 9866
14	Kells	2284 9882
15	Kells	2223 9901
16	Kells	2194 9906
17	Kells	2160 9892
18	Kells	2115 9882
19	Kells	2072 9892
20	Kells	2001 9887
21	Kells	1963 9916
22	Kells	1916 9925
23	Kells	1885 9921
24	Kells	1874 9888
25	Kells	1829 9879
26	Kells	1758 9862
27	Kells	1741 9854
28	Kells	1668 9848
29	Kells	1628 9819
30	Kells	1592 9819
31	Kells	1583 9771
32	Kells	1533 9757
33	Kells	1477 9756
34	Kells	1430 9732
35	Kells	1404 9738
36	Kells	1368 9706
37	Kells	1333 9705
38	Kells	1303 9781
39	Kells	1249 9809
40	Kells	1252 9808
41	Kells	1226 9764
42	Kells	1188 9734
43	Kells	1135 9700
44	Kells	1111 9733

Site_No_	River	4 Digit Grid_ref
45	Kells	1061 9713
46	Kells	1028 9710
47	Kells	0967 9730
1	Clough	1669 1695
2	Clough	1633 1666
3	Clough	1590 1623
4	Clough	1539 1581
5	Clough	1511 1542
6	Clough	1473 1539
7	Clough	1452 1514
8	Clough	1421 1506
9	Clough	1407 1463
10	Clough	1387 1433
11	Clough	1375 1429
12	Clough	1327 1410
13	Clough	1246 1377
14	Clough	1238 1353
15	Clough	1197 1334
16	Clough	1156 1305
17	Clough	1152 1238
18	Clough	1143 1185
19	Clough	1105 1132
20	Clough	1050 1132
21	Clough	1041 1084
22	Clough	0995 1104
23	Clough	0969 1093
24	Clough	0907 1065
25	Clough	0893 1081
26	Clough	0864 1126
27	Clough	0831 1194
28	Clough	0773 1269
29	Clough	0676 1288
30	Clough	0653 1296
31	Clough	0584 1286
1	Braid	2399 1100
2	Braid	2341 1078
3	Braid	2285 1032
4	Braid	2244 1012
5	Braid	2228 0988
6	Braid	2197 0944
7	Braid	2167 0892
8	Braid	2122 0838
9	Braid	2103 0829
10	Braid	2045 0834
11	Braid	1983 0821
12	Braid	1938 0798
13	Braid	1851 0765
14	Braid	1780 0725
15	Braid	1713 0717

Site_No_	River	4 Digit Grid_ref
16	Braid	1658 0685
17	Braid	1605 0669
18	Braid	1536 0671
19	Braid	1461 0670
20	Braid	1412 0612
21	Braid	1411 0586
22	Braid	1350 0566
23	Braid	1306 0536
24	Braid	1237 0469
25	Braid	1194 0410
26	Braid	1170 0359
27	Braid	1185 0306
28	Braid	1123 0269
29	Braid	1081 0294
30	Braid	1039 0245
31	Braid	1011 0202
32	Braid	0976 0146
33	Braid	0923 0177
34	Braid	0883 0157
35	Braid	0850 0143
1	Main	Not Conducted
2	Main	Not Conducted
3	Main	Not Conducted
4	Main	Not Conducted
5	Main	Not Conducted
6	Main	Not Conducted
7	Main	Not Conducted
8	Main	Not Conducted
9	Main	Not Conducted
10	Main	Not Conducted
11	Main	0564 1288
12	Main	0558 1234
13	Main	0565 1194
14	Main	0546 1148
15	Main	0505 1094
16	Main	0507 1069
17	Main	0501 1024
18	Main	0505 0953
19	Main	0490 0906
20	Main	0512 0873
21	Main	0515 0744
22	Main	0509 0701
23	Main	0532 0638
24	Main	0536 0606
25	Main	0550 0576
26	Main	0564 0530
27	Main	0577 0461
28	Main	0611 0441
29	Main	0624 0396

Site_No_	River	4 Digit Grid_ref
30	Main	0683 0351
31	Main	0701 0311
32	Main	0736 0277
33	Main	0775 0194
34	Main	0796 0171
35	Main	0830 0136
36	Main	0812 0045
37	Main	0939 9912
38	Main	0935 9733
39	Main	0904 9690
40	Main	0917 9617
41	Main	0798 9409
42	Main	0804 9304
43	Main	0795 9259
44	Main	0841 9174
45	Main	0826 9102
46	Main	0838 9023
1	Cloghmills	1016 1885
2	Cloghmills	0976 1878
3	Cloghmills	0936 1908
4	Cloghmills	0899 1923
5	Cloghmills	0852 1931
6	Cloghmills	0824 1925
7	Cloghmills	0775 1885
8	Cloghmills	0769 1859
9	Cloghmills	0743 1817
10	Cloghmills	0754 1795
11	Cloghmills	0755 1743
12	Cloghmills	0696 1774
13	Cloghmills	0665 1769
14	Cloghmills	0614 1764
15	Cloghmills	0586 1809
16	Cloghmills	0553 1798
17	Cloghmills	0524 1766
1	Killagan Water	0718 2065
2	Killagan Water	0684 2069
3	Killagan Water	0649 2070
4	Killagan Water	0608 2106
5	Killagan Water	0589 2119
6	Killagan Water	0541 2148
7	Killagan Water	0491 2196
8	Killagan Water	0470 2184
9	Killagan Water	0454 2129
10	Killagan Water	0434 2096
11	Killagan Water	0437 2060
12	Killagan Water	0429 2015
13	Killagan Water	0413 1997

Cultural Impact of Programmes and Events

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the cultural impact that programmes and events such as 'On Eagles Wing' have had in recent years; and what plans she has to support similar ventures in the future.
(AQW 5200/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Events such as on 'Eagles Wing' received funding from various sources within my Department including the Ulster-Scots Agency and Arts Council lottery funds. Such events have strived to promote the Ulster-Scots heritage and cultural issues.

The Ulster-Scots Agency continues to work alongside the Lyric Theatre and playwright Dan Gordon on the Pat and Plain series of school dramas. The Pat and Plain series were awarded a cultural diversity award from the 'Theatrical Management Association' in October 2011.

The Ulster-Scots Agency is currently considering projects to support other forthcoming events including the 2013 Derry Capital of Culture celebrations.

The Arts Council has identified events like the centenary of the Titanic in 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad programme which will bring considerable focus and attention next year.

Spend in West Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail her Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5224/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Table 1, which is attached, details spend in the West Belfast constituency between 2008/09 and 2011/12.

Budgets for 2012/13 to 2014/15 are indicative and it is not possible at this time to provide information on future funding at the level of detail asked for.

AQW 5224/11-15 Table 1

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
National Trust - Divis Mountain		24,971		
Ulster Wildlife Trust - Bog Meadow Wetland Restoration			20,000	
Féile an Phobail	20,000	20,000	20,000	
Aisling Ghéar	85,000	80,000	558,000	
An Nasc		30,000		
Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich		91,763	193,526	106,765
Forbairt Feirste	116,069		169,683	66,565
Pobal	180,030		262,512	99,430
Raidió Fáilte	93,068		149,373	55,913
Ionad Uíbh Eachach			124,665	
Glór na Móna			152,500	
An tÁisaonad	367,637	367,637	344,078	343,043
Altram	201,850	199,826	199,676	199,310
Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta	75,000	113,400		
Ionad Uíbh Eachach	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,500
Campa Chormaic, Co. Aontroma			3,500	3,500
Ionad Uíbh Eachach		3,500	3,500	3,500
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	2,570		940	
Cairde Gaelscoil na Móna		3,461	3,500	
Coláiste Feirste		3,500		5,667
Glór na Móna		3,500	3,500	3,500
Cairde Cheathrú na Gaeltachta		3,500	7,000	
Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta		18,371		
Coláiste Ollscoile Naomh Muire		2,850	2,450	
Naí-ionad an tSléibhe Dhuibh				3,500
Naíscail na Móna			3,500	
Cairde Gaelscoil na Móna			3,361	

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Coláiste Feirste			3,500	
Andersonstown Trampoline Club			19,194	
Antrim GAA County Board (Casement Park)			12,444	
Shankill Leisure Centre upgrade		95,540		
Belfast Urban Sports		6,000		
Blythefield Sports Complex		9,068		
Cairde Naomh Pól				8,100
Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club		2,374		
City of Belfast Archers Archery Club		7,750		
Colin Glen Trust				244,852
Colin Glen Trust			24,000	
Donegal Celtic FC			28,750	
Donegal Celtic FC			20,204	
Donegal Celtic FC	186,369			
Donegal Celtic FC	637,764			
Greater Shankill Partnership	35,874			
Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT)				3,881
Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT)	32,082			
Holy Trinity Youth Club			24,322	
Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club			29,395	
Lamh Dhearg GAC				245,000
Lenadoon Community Forum		80,000		
Lenadoon Community Forum			382,195	
Linfield FC			9,675	
Linfield FC			43,907	
Newhill Youth Club			23,309	
Newington YC				2,312
Patrick Sarsfield GAC		9,491		
Rising Stars				2,818
Roden Street Community Development Group			23,730	
Sport and Leisure FC		87,050		
Sport and Leisure FC				1,791
Sportopps.com Ltd		6,129		
St Agnes GAC			14,612	
St Galls GAC		4,434		
St John Bosco Amateur Boxing Club				3,800
St John's GAC (Belfast)			28,970	
St John's GAC (Belfast)			28,028	
St John's Youth Club			21,546	
St Paul's Amateur Boxing Club		8,785		
St Paul's Amateur Boxing Club		755		
St Paul's Amateur Boxing Club			29,574	
St Teresa's Youth Centre			30,000	
Stadium Youth & Community Centre				245,000
Stadium Youth & Community Centre			25,832	
Upper Springfield Development Trust	48,834			
Woodvale Cricket Club		186,800		
Falls Library Capital spend			554,771	211,347

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Shankill Library Capital spend			580,911	261,674
Whiterock Library Capital spend			477,772	
Belfast Orangefest	4,300			
Suffolk after-schools club	2,640			
West Belfast Orange Hall	250			
Black mountain primary school		2,000		
Young Curators Programme 2009		12,000		
Kids in Control		4,700		
Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA)		40,000		
Aisling Ghear Theatre Company		67,320		
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School		50,000		
Array Studios		6,400		
Bruiser Theatre Company		45,000		
Catalyst Arts Ltd		20,000		
Craft and Design Collective/ County Down Crafts		10,000		
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich		161,290		
Digital Arts Studios		36,000		
Headliners		19,400		
Kids in Control		30,000		
Lagan Press Ltd		49,600		
Queen Street Studios		31,032		
Spanner in the Works		14,460		
Youth Action Northern Ireland		25,000		
Feile an Phobail		123,000		
Replay Theatre Company		115,635		
The Beat Initiative		120,000		
Conway Mill Preservation Trust Ltd		79,843		
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich		308,508		
Queen Street Studios		11,250		
Craft & Design Collective		75,000		
Crucible Pictures Ltd.		10,000		
David Baxter Audio Services		7,100		
Digital Arts Studios		7,811		
Elevation Design		18,412		
Garvan Traynor		3,625		
Red Earth Designs		10,000		
Simply Rouge		9,642		
"Creative Economy NI" & "Cultural Leadership International"		50,000		
West Belfast Development Trust Limited t/a Work West		48,994		
West Belfast Partnership Board		10,000		
Catalyst Arts Ltd		10,045		
The Beat Initiative		125,000		
Bruiser Theatre Company		37,230		
Bruiser Theatre Company		32,825		
Catalyst Arts Ltd		13,160		
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership		21,350		
Craft & Design Collective		40,100		
Digital Arts Studios		7,080		

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Feile an Phobail		23,410		
Headliners		20,900		
Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA)		14,650		
Replay Theatre Company		30,638		
Replay Theatre Company		19,883		
Spanner in the Works		17,014		
The Beat Initiative		46,450		
Upper Springfield Development Trust		20,000		
Youth Action Northern Ireland		36,830		
Upper Falls Protestant Boys		4,658		
Suffolk Community Forum		40,195		
Lower Shankill Community Association		26,650		
Ann Zell		1,545		
Clare McComish		300		
Deborah Malcomson		1,000		
Frank Lyons		650		
James Rainey		500		
Janet Preston		2,460		
Kinga Pers		2,384		
Mary Fields		800		
Ms Emma Connolly		3,000		
Peter Richards		2,185		
Belfast Orangefest		6,294		
Clonard Neighbourhood Development Partnership		925		
Families with Ups and Down's		8,000		
Indian Community Centre		6,000		
TheatreofplucK		8,960		
Upper Falls Protestant Boys		2,500		
An Munia Tober			9,920	
Upper Springfield Development Company Ltd			19,410	
Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA)			40,000	
POBAL			10,000	
Queen Street Studios			3,000	
Aisling Ghear Theatre Company			67,320	
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School			50,000	
Array Studios			7,800	
Bruiser Theatre Company			45,000	
Catalyst Arts Ltd			20,000	
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich			161,290	
Digital Arts Studios			40,000	
Feile an Phobail			123,000	
Kids in Control			37,140	
Lagan Press Ltd			49,600	
POBAL			25,000	
Queen Street Studios			31,032	
Replay Theatre Company			115,635	
Spanner in the Works			22,000	
The Beat Initiative			110,000	

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Youth Action Northern Ireland			25,000	
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich			503,000	
Headliners (UK)			10,176	
Kids in Control			14,926	
An Munia Tober			21,670	
Bruiser Theatre Company			33,635	
Bruiser Theatre Company			34,138	
Catalyst Arts Ltd			10,768	
Craft and Design Collective/ County Down Crafts			39,000	
Digital Arts Studios			13,385	
Digital Arts Studios			10,000	
Feile an Phobail			23,000	
Headliners (UK)			40,298	
Kids in Control			15,500	
Replay Theatre Company			20,000	
Replay Theatre Company			17,680	
The Beat Initiative			40,000	
Upper Springfield Development Company Ltd			20,000	
Youth Action Northern Ireland			36,830	
An Nasc			25,000	
Shankill Women's Centre			14,700	
Brian Connolly			3,495	
Clare McComish			1,115	
Derek Keilty			1,400	
Gary Shaw			1,040	
Gary Shaw			690	
Gerard mo chara kelly			1,750	
Grainne Holland			2,000	
James Rainey			2,000	
Mr Des Kennedy			3,750	
Mr Eanna Monaghan			1,500	
Richard John O'Rawe			1,600	
Aisling Ghear Theatre Company			10,000	
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School			8,200	
Belfast Orangefest			6,680	
Brassneck Theatre Company			8,000	
Families with Ups and Down's			6,200	
Glor Na Mona			2,100	
Spanner in the Works			8,080	
Spanner in the Works			10,000	
Brassneck Theatre Company				7,000
Aisling Ghear Theatre Company				67,320
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School				50,000
Array Studios				7,800
Bruiser Theatre Company				45,000
Catalyst Arts Ltd				20,000
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich				161,290
Digital Arts Studios				40,000

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Feile an Phobail				123,000
Kids in Control				37,140
Lagan Press Ltd				49,600
POBAL				25,000
Queen Street Studios				31,032
Replay Theatre Company				115,635
Spanner in the Works				22,000
The Beat Initiative				110,000
Youth Action Northern Ireland				25,000
Crucible Pictures Ltd.				10,000
Stephen Downey				9,800
Natasha Cuddington				5,000
Aisling Ghear Theatre Company				14,595
Bruiser Theatre Company				62,232
Catalyst Arts Ltd				25,830
Craft and Design Collective/ County Down Crafts				46,279
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich				15,580
Digital Arts Studios				14,946
Feile an Phobail				25,000
Giant Events Company C.I.C				80,000
Headliners (UK)				39,771
Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA)				43,000
Replay Theatre Company				37,836
Spanner in the Works				11,730
Youth Action Northern Ireland				36,900
Belfast Martyrs Republican Flute Band (B.M.R.FB)				4,500
Brian Connolly				500
Garvan Traynor				2,100
James Rainey				500
Janet Preston				2,197
Joby Fox				500
Kinga Pers				312
Miss Jane Butler				1,200
Natasha Cuddington				1,470
Paul Kennedy				1,500
Peter Richards				1,426
Stephen Dunne				5,000
Tim Brannigan				950
Catalyst Arts Ltd				3,365
POBAL				1,810
The Beat Initiative				2,000
FASA (Forum for Action on Substance Abuse)				5,000
Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA)	45,000			
POBAL	25,000			
Aisling Ghear Theatre Company	67,320			
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School	50,000			
Bruiser Theatre Company	45,000			
Catalyst Arts Ltd	20,000			

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich	161,290			
Headliners	5,000			
Kids in Control	30,000			
Lagan Press Ltd	49,600			
Queen Street Studios	31,032			
Spanner in the Works	14,460			
Youth Action Northern Ireland	25,000			
Feile an Phobail	123,000			
Replay Theatre Company	115,635			
The Beat Initiative	100,000			
Bruiser Theatre Company	23,500			
Bruiser Theatre Company	29,890			
Catalyst Arts Ltd	18,695			
Digital Arts Studios	57,387			
Feile an Phobail	17,875			
Headliners	36,918			
Kids in Control	24,898			
Replay Theatre Company	39,500			
Spanner in the Works	19,000			
The Beat Initiative	17,000			
Youth Action Northern Ireland	32,500			
An Munia Tober	21,460			
Upper Springfield Development Company Ltd	30,000			
Upper Springfield Development Company Ltd	22,000			
Clare McComish	3,000			
Danny Dodds	250			
Derek Keilty	3,693			
Gary Shaw	2,500			
Janet Preston	2,600			
Mr Des Kennedy	4,045			
Mr Eanna Monaghan	5,000			
Mr Francis O'Hare	800			
Natasha Cuddington	2,970			
Patrick McKeown	1,900			
Peter Richards	1,350			
Richard John O'Rawe	3,710			
Robert Walsh	2,000			
Robin Doherty	3,399			
Sean O'Kane	1,500			
Sharon Morgan	1,100			
Stephen Dunne	2,500			
Corpus Christi Youth Centre	2,905			
Féile an Phobail	5,000			
Glór na Móna	4,601			
St Oliver Plunkett Luncheon Club	1,351			
Upper Andersonstown Festival Committee	3,316			
Belfast Computer Clubhouse		1,385		
Féile an Phobail		3,000		

Project	Amount £			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Féile an Phobail		2,500		
Glór na Móna		2,000		
Lenadoon Community Forum		1,250		
2010 Now & Then			1,250	
Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich			2,500	
Forthspring Inter Community Group			2,055	
Glór na Móna			1,936	
Upper Andersonstown Festival Committee			2,500	
Upper Springfield Resource Centre			2,500	
Creative Minds Seminar - Seminar organised by West Belfast partnership Board		5,049		
Lottery Film Fund	89,500			
Lottery Film Fund		52,825		
Lottery Film Fund			12,250	
Skills Bursary Fund		338		
Skills Bursary Fund			5,937	
Skills Bursary Fund	2,125			
TOBAR	25,000	169,677	206,498	44,807
Bóthar Ard			45,000	41,160
Belfast Media Group			90,477	
SONAS		78,000	134,343	
Screen Fund	89,500			
Cinemagic After School Film Clubs		1,290	2,580	3,870
Studio-On Creative Learning Centre Programmes		65,600	60,400	34,000
Digital Film Archive Outreach Presentation Programme			294	
Total	3,656,411	4,125,462	7,271,378	3,698,251

Salmon: Illegal Netting in Lough Neagh

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the extent of the illegal netting of salmon in Lough Neagh; and how her Department polices the Lough.

(AQW 5247/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Illegal netting is an illegal fishing activity and DCAL is concerned with any illegal fishing activity taking place throughout its operational area, including Lough Neagh.

It is not possible to make a definitive determination on the extent of illegal netting for salmon on Lough Neagh as illegal nets are indiscriminate and not species specific. The placement of certain illegal nets at river mouths and the timing of these placements would suggest that there is some level of targeting of salmonids (salmon and trout).

In 2010 some 14712 yards of illegal nets were seized on Lough Neagh but no salmon were identified in these.

There are a small number of fishermen on Lough Neagh licensed by DCAL to capture salmon and freshwater fish. Catches of salmon are monitored through a carcass tagging scheme and these are very small with only 9 salmon recorded as being caught in Lough Neagh in 2010.

A team of 3 DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers, under the management of a Senior Fisheries Officer, operate from their base at Derrycrow on the southern shore of the Lough. They carry out regular boat and shore patrols of the Lough and its tributaries to detect, disrupt and deter those involved in illegal fishing activities.

When necessary Fishery Protection Officers based in other areas can be tasked to assist with operations with the Lough Neagh team.

DCAL Fisheries Protection staff also work closely with local angling clubs, many of which have Private Water Bailiffs who play an important role in supporting the Department in combating illegal fishing activities.

In addition Fisheries Protection Officers undertake inspections of fish dealers' premises and businesses selling fish such as hotels, restaurants and commercial outlets, to ensure that those engaged comply fully with the 1966 Fisheries Act and Fisheries Regulations.

Schools: Ulster Scots

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the Minister of Education on the development of the Ulster-Scots culture in schools.

(AQW 5282/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not as yet met with the Minister of Education to discuss the development of the Ulster-Scots culture in schools; however I will ensure that it will be on the agenda at a future meeting.

Salmon: Scientific Papers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her Department's assessment of the scientific papers presented to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea at the Salmon Summit on the 11 to 13 October 2011.

(AQW 5439/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The DCAL Chief Fisheries Officer attended the Salmon Summit at La Rochelle, France in October 2011.

At the event scientists confirmed that wild Atlantic salmon are dying at sea in alarming numbers, to the extent that southern stocks, including some in North America and Europe, are threatened with extinction.

International research is on-going to better understand the factors influencing the mortality rate in the oceanic phase of the salmon life cycle.

A clear message coming from the event is to ensure that the maximum number of healthy wild salmon go to sea from rivers. In order to keep salmon populations abundant factors such as degraded freshwater habitat, barriers to migration, over exploitation and salmon farming must continue to be addressed.

Fishing Licences

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the holders of licences, which have been issued by her Department, to fish for salmon or trout by net in coastal waters.

(AQW 5524/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am unable to list the holders of licences issued by the Department in order to comply with Data Protection legislation.

Fishing Licences

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the holders of licences, which have been issued by her Department, to fish for salmon or trout in rivers or in Lough Neagh.

(AQW 5525/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am unable to list the holders of licences issued by the Department in order to comply with Data Protection legislation.

Department of Education

Tendering Process for Home-to-school Transport

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education (i) whether the tendering process for home-to-school transport provision awards contracts on a financial quality basis; and (ii) to publish the tendering process for Co. Fermanagh.

(AQW 4620/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education and Library Boards employ a two-stage competitive tendering process for home to school transport. The first stage – selection - requires tenderers to demonstrate that they can comply with a series of selection criteria, including roadworthiness of vehicles, appropriate taxing, insuring and licensing, and appropriately licensed drivers. The second stage – award - involves only those tenderers that have successfully met the stage one criteria. A contract is awarded to the operator who has the capacity to carry out the contract in the most economic and effective fashion vis-à-vis the competitors.

There is no tendering process solely for Fermanagh so this may not be published. The Western Education and Library Board operates a tender process on a whole-Board basis. Routes that are put out to tender are dependent on the needs of the service and can vary from year to year and from tender period to tender period. The current tender was advertised in the EU Journal and the selection and award criteria were included in the tender documentation forwarded to any prospective tenderer. I have arranged for a copy of the tender to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Road Safety: Children Cycling to School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to encourage road safety for children cycling to school.

(AQW 4743/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While the Department for the Environment has statutory responsibility for the delivery of road safety education in our schools, the revised curriculum, now being taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools, provides opportunities for schools to address road safety which could include cycling to school.

These opportunities are provided through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and also the World Around Areas of Learning at primary level and through the Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work at post-primary level.

Whilst these opportunities exist, the revised curriculum is more flexible and it is a matter for schools to decide on specific areas they wish to cover under the Areas of Learning which are detailed in the 2007 Curriculum Minimum Content Order 2007.

The Department did, however, write to all schools in March 2010 to remind them about the importance of ensuring the effective delivery of road safety messages through the revised curriculum and to inform them about the existing opportunities within the curriculum to highlight road safety.

The Department is supportive of children walking and cycling to school because of the obvious health benefits. In previous years the Department was able to make available funding for work in a number of schools, such as the provision of cycle shelters and cycle paths within the school grounds. Due to the current financial constraints the Department has to concentrate available funding on meeting key statutory requirements, such as Health & Safety and Fire Protection.

DE: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4821/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the public appointments I have made since my appointment as Minister:

Name of Body	Name of Appointee
Belfast Education & Library Board	Mr Ciaran O'Grady Mr Alastair Mackay
North Eastern Education & Library Board	Alderman John Robert (Roy) Beggs Alderman James Kerr Fulton Currie Cllr Charles (James) Brown Cllr Trevor Clarke Cllr Albert (Samuel) Cole Cllr John Francis (Sean) Kerr Cllr Mrs Lynn Frazer Cllr Mrs Evelyne Lavine Robinson
Southern Education & Library Board	Cllr James Ignatius Cavanagh Cllr John (Sean) Gerard Clarke Cllr Junior McCrum Cllr Sylvia Flora Agnes McRoberts
Western Education & Library Board	Cllr Shaun Patrick Gallagher Cllr Robert James Irvine Cllr Declan McAleer Cllr Mrs Ann Patricia Brolly

All public appointments are detailed in OFMDFM, Central Appointment Unit's Public Appointments Annual Report for 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and their Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2009/2010.

The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report for 2010/2011 will be published in due course in the normal manner.

The reports are available on the OFMDFM website and can be accessed from the following link: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/making-government-work/public-appointments.htm>

Post-primary Education: Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on what action the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools is taking in relation to post-primary education.

(AQW 4833/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The NI Commission for Catholic Education, on which the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is represented, established a Post-primary Review Team (PPRT) in 2006 to consider educational provision in Catholic secondary and grammar schools. The Commission did so in response to a range of developments in education at the time, including the intention to end academic selection, downward demographic trends and changes to the statutory curriculum, particularly the introduction of the Entitlement Framework. To date the report has not been published.

In my statement to the Assembly on 26 September 2011, I indicated that I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a

strategic area planning process based on each Board area. This process will result in an effectively planned, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools and will ensure that we have the right type and size of schools, in the right places, to meet the needs of pupils.

The work undertaken by the PPRT will inform the development of area plans which I have asked to be completed by March 2012.

Preschool Education

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how he intends to ensure that one year of pre-school education is available for all children who require it.

(AQW 4835/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Draft Programme for Government included a commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose parent wants to avail of it. This is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP), which launched in 1998.

In the 2011/2012 school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision. Funded pre-school education places are available in statutory nursery schools, nursery units in Primary Schools and in voluntary and private sector settings. Both sectors are equally valued and must adhere to the same pre-school curricular guidance and are inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

DE is currently working with Education and Library Boards to ensure an adequate number of funded pre-school places are available. If necessary, additional capacity in the pre-school education sector may be achieved through several options such as the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of additional funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings participating in the PSEEP.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, in light of the announcement to introduce the Education and Skills Authority by 2013, when he intends to reconstitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 4941/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My focus is on delivering the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to establish ESA in 2013 and on ensuring, in the interim, stability and good governance in the Education and Library Boards and other education bodies. I have asked my officials to explore the feasibility of reconstituting the South Eastern Education and Library Board pending the establishment of ESA, bearing in mind the need to ensure continued stability and good governance.

Educational Psychologists

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to detail the role of educational psychologists in assessing children being considered for educational statementing.

(AQW 4952/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The role of the educational psychologist in assessing children being considered for statementing is to provide, when requested, educational psychology advice to the Education and Library board, under the guidance of the Code of Practice.

The advice must set out the psychological features of the case relevant to the child's educational needs including any future needs. It must also set out how those features could affect the child's educational needs and the provision which is appropriate for the child, whether by way of special educational provision or non-educational provision.

When preparing the advice, a wide range of factors which might affect the child's functioning should be addressed. Educational psychologists may need to liaise with occupational therapists and physiotherapists for advice. They should also consider any advice which parents may submit independently from a fully qualified educational psychologist.

The advice should be returned to the Board within the statutory time frame of six weeks and once all advice is returned, consideration is given as to whether a Statement is made. Where a Statement is made, this will be issued to the parents by the Board in draft form for their consideration.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how the Irish-medium and integrated sector will be included in the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 4979/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The functions of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will apply to all grant-aided schools, including Irish-medium and integrated schools. Persons representing the interests of the Irish-medium and integrated sectors may apply to be appointed as members of the ESA. My Department will continue to support Comhairle na Gaelscoiaochta and the Council for Integrated Education to represent their respective sectors.

Shared Education: Advisory Group

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, in light of the commitment in the draft Programme for Government, (i) when he will establish an advisory group to advance shared education; (ii) whether he or the Executive will approve the terms of reference of the group; and (iii) what is the anticipated timeframe for these deliberations.

(AQW 5049/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Programme for Government commitment is that the group will report with recommendations before the end of 2012/13. I will approve the terms of reference and establish the group by 1 April 2012.

Primary and Post-Primary: Unit of Resource

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to outline the main constituent elements of the unit of resource for (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary pupils; and to explain the reasons for the differential between the unit of resource for primary and post-primary pupils.

(AQW 5054/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The main constituent elements of the unit of resource for schools is the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding factor. The associated values for (i) primary; and (ii) post primary pupils are detailed in the table below;

	AWPU Weight	AWPU Cash Value	AWPU Funding per pupil 2011-12
Primary School	1.06	£2,041	£2,163
Post Primary Yr 8-12	1.68	£2,041	£3,429
Post Primary Yr 13-15	2.18	£2,041	£4,449

The reasons for the differential between the main unit of resource for primary and post primary pupils arises largely from the different approaches taken to the delivery of the curriculum, and hence the cost demands of each. In the primary sector, the arrangements provide for a pupil centred approach with pupils normally taught in one class for all their subjects. The provision of a wider range of subjects by post-primary schools results in additional teaching costs, materials and equipment, specialist facilities and examination fees. Practical classes must be conducted within specified maximum class sizes and in addition, post-16 classes tend to be generally smaller.

Different weightings are therefore applied for funding purposes to primary and post-primary pupils and this is the main factor which creates the differential in the average per-pupil funding for each.

There are a number of other factors used to distribute funding across schools, and the Age Weighted Pupil Unit does not alone represent the overall levels of funding, on average, for pupils at each phase. For example, in the current 2011-12 year, when all funding factors are included and pupils in all year groups are taken into account, the average level of funding per pupil in primary schools was £3,007, compared to £4,191 at post-primary level.

DE: Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 5067/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost to the Department of Education of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years is shown in the following table:

Financial year	£'000
2009-10	359
2010-11	338

Schools: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education what additional training, specifically relevant to the provision of education and training opportunities for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in mainstream schools, has been given to decision makers in schools, including School Management and members of Boards of Governor, (i) prior to; and (ii) since the introduction of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 5076/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The education and library boards are responsible for providing autism-specific training in mainstream schools.

Prior to the introduction of the Autism Act 2011 all boards delivered a range of autism-specific training for school staff including special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), heads of department, heads of year, principals, vice-principals, teachers and classroom assistants. This training was available to members of boards of governors.

Since the introduction of the Autism Act this training programme has continued.

In addition, for the past three years, the Middletown Centre for Autism has provided a comprehensive range of training opportunities for those supporting children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) across all schools. Each year schools receive a detailed prospectus of training courses available from the Centre.

The training provided by the Centre is tailored to the needs of educational professionals, school staff and parents. A range of sessions are specifically designed to the needs of staff in mainstream schools. In partnership with the inter-board ASD teams, the Centre also provides tailored whole school training for schools upon request.

Schools: Asperger's Syndrome

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education what specific training has been given to the Boards of Governors of mainstream schools on the provision of education and training for pupils with Asperger's Syndrome.

(AQW 5077/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Specific training for Boards of Governors of mainstream schools on the provision of education and training for pupils with Asperger's Syndrome is not routinely provided through the ELBs School Governors Training Programme. However, where such training is needed and is requested by governors, the Autistic Service of the relevant ELB may put in place the necessary arrangements. The Department does not hold a record of such training.

Schools: Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) how many complaints lodged with the Boards of Governors of mainstream schools have been upheld, in the first instance, in each of the last ten years; and (ii) how many of these complaints related to pupils with (a) Autistic Spectrum Disorders; and (b) Asperger's Syndrome.

(AQW 5078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold records of (i) the complaints lodged with school Boards of Governors or (ii) the number of those complaints that relate to pupils with (a) Autistic Spectrum Disorders and (b) Asperger's Syndrome. This information is therefore not available in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

DE: Press Office

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many staff currently work in his Department's press office; and to detail the running costs of the press office in the last financial year.

(AQW 5105/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's Press Office is part of the Communications Team which comprises a total of 13 staff - 5 information officers, 4 administrative staff and a Desktop Publishing Unit comprising 4 graphic design staff. In addition to press and public relations work the Communications Team has responsibility for; the Departmental website and intranet, managing webmail queries, updating the NI Direct website, design and print of documents, preparation of ministerial briefings relating to school visits and oversight of internal communications. Four of the 5 information officers would be primarily engaged in traditional press office functions and their salary costs for 2010/11 were £166,777. It is not possible to disaggregate other running costs.

Gross salary details include gross pay received, and corresponding employer's national insurance contributions and superannuation costs.

Programme for Government: DE

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what was the outcome of the pledge in the last Programme for Government to deliver major building projects at more than 100 schools.

(AQW 5116/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Public Service Agreement (PSA 16), contained within the Programme for Government, stated that building projects would be advanced at over 100 schools over the period to 2011.

There were 108 major capital school projects on my Department's Investment Delivery Plan (IDP). Of these 39 projects have been completed and there are a further 17 projects where construction work is currently progressing on site. This represents capital investment in the schools estate of over £536 million

Going forward I have commissioned the ELB's working in close conjunction with CCMS and the other sectors, to coordinate a strategic area planning process to determine the future pattern of education delivery. Previously identified projects, including those projects not started under the previous Programme for Government, will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process.

Nursery School Places: Ballymena

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many fully funded places will be available at each nursery in the Ballymena Borough Council area.

(AQW 5130/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools, nursery units in Primary Schools and in voluntary and private sector pre-school education centres.

The tables below detail the approved enrolment figure for nursery schools and units and voluntary/private settings in the Ballymena Borough Council area in the current school year:

Statutory nursery schools/units

Name of School	Number of nursery places
Ballykeel Primary School	52
Ballymena Nursery School	104
Braidside Integrated Primary School	26
Broughshane Primary School	26
Buick Memorial Primary school	26
Clough Primary School	26
Dunclug Nursery School	78
Gracehill Primary School	26
Harryville Primary School	26
St Mary's Primary School	26
Total	416

Voluntary/private settings

Name of School	Number of nursery places
Ballee Pre-School Playgroup	33
Broughshane Centre of Early Learning	21
First Steps Playgroup	21
Glenravel Community Playgroup	39
Gracehill/Galgorm Playgroup	26
Happitots Playgroup	24
High Kirk Community Playgroup	20
Kenbaan Community Playgroup	37
Kirkinriola Early Years	19
Portglenone Community Playgroup	17
St Louis Playgroup	24
Stepping Stones Playgroup	18
The Country Playgroup	37
Tiny-Tots Community Playgroup	31
Total	367

The overall number of funded pre-school places available in the Ballymena Borough Council area in the current school year is 783.

Early Years: Strategic Alliance Manifesto

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the recommendations in the Early Years Strategic Alliance Manifesto.

(AQW 5146/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Manifesto provides a useful contribution to the debate on early years services and how the Executive should meet the needs of children and their families over the coming years. The recommendations address a range of issues but press for a fundamental reshaping of how early childhood and care services are delivered.

The Executive's draft Programme for Government (PfG) acknowledges the importance of working more effectively across departments, and also signals its intention to work in partnership with the private and the voluntary and community sectors in ways that will deliver tangible outcomes. Some of the issues identified by the Alliance are also included in the draft PfG – for example child poverty, childcare and the commitment to the funded pre-school year.

Schools: ICT Accreditation

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many schools are ICT accredited.
(AQW 5147/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Statutory assessment of the cross-curricular skill of Using ICT against Levels of Progression (LoP) will be introduced from 2013/14. In the interim, schools can choose to participate in the CCEA voluntary ICT Primary and Post-Primary Accreditation Schemes.

The number of schools registered in 2010/11 for the CCEA ICT Accreditation Schemes and, through the moderation process, have had their judgment to award Levels confirmed, is as follows:

Primary Sector 556 schools
Post Primary Sector 35 schools

In addition, 102 schools registered and used the schemes this year to prepare tasks and become familiar with the LoP in advance of the introduction of the statutory requirements.

Grammar Schools: Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what percentage of children attend a Grammar school in each council area.
(AQW 5154/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of post-primary pupils who attended grammar schools, by area of residence, 2010/11

Council Area Resided In	% of pupils attending grammar schools
Antrim	48.5
Ards	49.7
Armagh	28.9
Ballymena	49.1
Ballymoney	43.9
Banbridge	39.2
Belfast	37.8
Carrickfergus	47.3
Castlereagh	60.8
Coleraine	56.3
Cookstown	26.8
Craigavon	31.4
Derry	43.3
Down	42.8
Dungannon	43.6
Fermanagh	46.2
Larne	37.4
Limavady	33.8
Lisburn	48.0
Magherafelt	28.0
Moyle	14.4
Newry & Mourne	37.8
Newtownabbey	45.0
North Down	59.7
Omagh	42.7
Strabane	30.3
Total	42.0

Source: NI school census

Note:

- 1 Figures in the table relate to area of residence of pupils.
- 2 There were 1,640 pupils in post-primary schools in NI in 2010/11, for whom a valid NI postcode was not held.

Schools: Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the findings of the evidence based assessment of current provision for children with autism which was recently carried out by his Department.

(AQW 5155/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following the introduction of the Autism Act earlier this year, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is the lead department in the development of a cross-departmental autism strategy. Aligned to this is my Department's ongoing work on the development of a strategic framework for autism provision in the education sector.

In order to underpin this strategic framework an assessment of current autism practice in the education sector was undertaken. Important themes identified as part of the assessment include the need for more collaborative partnership across education and health bodies including the two departments, education and library boards, health trusts and schools; differences in educational provision across the five education and library board areas which can give rise to an inequity of access to educational services for children with autism; and a need to identify and disseminate best practice through a structured approach to research and training.

The Department is developing responses to these issues within the context of the cross-departmental autism strategy.

Gaelscoil an Chaistil, Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to outline the work his Department has carried out in the last three years, and the work his Department plans to carry out over the next three years, to improve accommodation and access at Gaelscoil an Chaistil, Ballycastle.

(AQW 5160/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Gaelscoil an Chaistil qualified for capital funding from the Department in the 2009/10 financial year, following which the Department grant-aided the provision of a replacement double temporary classroom, together with a modular building for ancillary accommodation at a cost of £372K inclusive of professional fees. The Department also paid £350k grant-aid to the school for the purchase of the site at Kiln's Road. A £120k contribution was also made to DRD for improvements to the footpaths and entrance to the school.

In relation to proposed works planned at the school in the next 3 years you will be aware that I made a statement to the Assembly on 26 September. In that statement I set out the plans for the future of education provision. I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained schools and the other sectors to undertake viability audits of all schools focusing on sustainable enrolments, quality of education and financial viability.

In any area potential capital projects, such as Gaelscoil an Chaistil, will be critically assessed as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needs of an area. Future capital investment will, therefore, be targeted at supporting area plans.

Sure Start: Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale behind the selection of individual electoral wards in Fermanagh for Sure Start provision.

(AQW 5176/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When Sure Start was introduced here during 2000/01, under the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the four Childcare Partnerships were asked to identify suitable localities within their area and to support potential applicants in these areas to enable them to submit sustainable bids for Sure Start funding. Each proposal had to provide an assessment of the overall extent to which children in the area were failing to fulfil their potential.

In July 2000, Ministerial approval was given for the first 15 Programmes across the North. Cherish Sure Start in Fermanagh was launched in January 2001 and was originally established to provide services to the following five wards: Irvinestown, Kesh Ederney and Lack, Trillick, Ballinamallard and Lisnarick.

The Children and Young People's funding package (2006-2008) enabled the establishment of the policy of ensuring coverage to at least the top 20% most disadvantaged wards (per NI MDM). In addition to the five existing wards, three further wards were identified within the Fermanagh area which met this criteria and Cherish Sure Start extended provision to offer outreach services to the wards of Newtownbutler, Rosslea and Devenish.

Sure Start Services are provided from the centre base in Irvinestown and a range of services are also delivered on an outreach basis in community centres, leisure centres and playgroups throughout the operational catchment area. Sure Start is a universal service within the designated wards and as such persons living within the catchment wards may attend a service at any location.

The draft Early Years 0-6 Strategy contained a commitment to seek to expand the reach of Sure Start. A phased plan is being drafted for the incremental extension of the coverage of Sure Start to the top 25% most disadvantaged wards over time. The introduction of this and the further expansion of Sure Start will depend on the availability of additional resources.

No additional wards in County Fermanagh have been identified as falling within the top 25% most disadvantaged wards.

Sure Start

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the shortest; and (ii) the longest distance that residents of each qualifying electoral ward live from their Sure Start centre.

(AQW 5178/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When Sure Start was introduced here during 2000/01, under the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the four Childcare Partnerships were asked to identify suitable localities within their area and to support potential applicants in these areas to enable them to submit sustainable bids for Sure Start funding. Each proposal had to provide an assessment of the overall extent to which children in the area were failing to fulfil their potential.

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No additional wards in County Fermanagh have been identified as falling within the top 25% most disadvantaged wards.

Sure Start: Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans to expand the provision of Sure Start to other electoral wards in County Fermanagh.

(AQW 5180/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When Sure Start was introduced here during 2000/01, under the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the four Childcare Partnerships were asked to identify suitable localities within their area and to support potential applicants in these areas to enable them to submit sustainable bids for Sure Start funding. Each proposal had to provide an assessment of the overall extent to which children in the area were failing to fulfil their potential.

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No additional wards in County Fermanagh have been identified as falling within the top 25% most disadvantaged wards.

Interactive Computerised Assessment System

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Interactive Computerised Assessment System.

(AQW 5186/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS) is the method currently specified by the Department to be used by schools in carrying out assessments in the autumn term. Schools administer the assessments throughout the term and at this time the majority of schools have completed them. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment monitors feedback from schools and receives regular reports from the developers about the performance of their systems. No systemic issues have been raised by schools this year.

The contract with the University of Durham's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) for provision of the InCAS assessments is due to end in January 2012. The use of data from computer-based assessments remains a key aspect of the Department's

school improvement policy and a public procurement process has been carried out to identify suppliers of these assessments from September 2012 onwards. The outcome of this process is that new providers for Literacy and Numeracy assessments have been identified, specifically Tribal Education Ltd and Rising Stars UK Ltd. Schools have been notified about this outcome and more detailed communication, including arrangements for trialling and evaluation of the new assessments prior to implementation, will issue in the near future.

Schools: Closures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools which have been closed in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, in each of the last five years, broken down by the (a) maintained; (b) controlled; and (c) integrated sectors.

(AQW 5189/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The schools closed in the period 2007 to 2011 are set out in the tables below:-

(i) Primary Schools

Sector	Year	School	Date of closure	
(a) Controlled	2007	Groomsport PS	31/08/07	
		Charley Memorial PS	31/08/07	
		Drumbo PS	31/08/07	
		Hillhall PS	31/08/07	
		Lambeg PS	31/08/07	
	2008	Conlig PS	31/08/08	
		2009	Newtownbreda PS	31/08/09
	2011		Ballycloughan PS	31/08/11
			Derriaghy PS	31/08/11
	(b) Maintained	2007	St Mary's PS, Ballygowan	31/08/07
2008		Guinness PS	31/08/08	
2009		St Colman's PS, Moira	31/03/09	
(c) Integrated	2008	Kindle IPS	31/08/08	
		Hilden IPS	30/11/08	

(ii) Post-Primary

Sector	Year	School	Date of closure
(a) Controlled	2008	Lisnasharragh HS	31/08/08
	2009	Donaghadee HS	31/08/09
(b) Maintained			
(c) Integrated	2008	Down Academy	31/08/08

Schools: Audit

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education whether the audit of schools, under the Sustainable Schools Policy, will include all schools.
(AQW 5194/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Viability Audit, which are available from the Department's website (<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/area-planning-2.htm>), the audit will apply to all grant-aided primary and post-primary schools, including those with special units, of all management types in each of the five Education and Library Board areas. At this stage it will not apply to nursery schools or special schools.

Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn and Dunmurry High School, Belfast: Proposed Closure

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how many letters he has received in relation to the proposed closure of (i) Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn; and (ii) Dunmurry High School, Belfast.

(AQW 5195/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have received 16 letters in relation to the proposed closure of Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn and 4 letters in relation to the proposed closure of Dunmurry High School, Belfast.

Schools: Entrepreneurs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department has provided towards encouraging children and young people to become entrepreneurs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5217/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Employability, which includes enterprise and entrepreneurship, is an integral part of the revised curriculum delivered through the areas of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary level and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post-primary. Schools receive delegated budgets to enable them to deliver all aspects of the curriculum, including the PDMU and LLW areas of learning and the Department does not hold financial information regarding spending on employability activities by each individual school.

In addition to schools delegated budgets, my Department provides funding to a number of organisations for programmes for both primary and post-primary pupils, designed to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship and to introduce young people to the world of work. Organisations include Young Enterprise, Sentinus, School Employer Connections, Charter Work Experience and a number of Business Education Partnerships. The funding allocated to deliver these activities over the last five years is as follows:

- 2006/07 – £700k*
- 2007/08 – £715k*
- 2008/09 – £1,550k
- 2009/10 – £1,545k
- 2010/11 - £1,550k

* Prior to 2008/09, Young Enterprise was funded by Invest NI for enterprise & entrepreneurship activities and therefore is not included in these figures.

DE: Spend in West Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.

(AQW 5262/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department and its Arms Length Bodies do not hold the information in the format requested.

Schools: Closures

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of schools which were closed between 2009 and 2011.

(AQW 5277/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been 25 school closures between 2009 and 2011. This total is broken down as follows:

- 10 Controlled primary schools
- 8 Maintained primary schools
- 2 Preparatory departments
- 3 Controlled post-primary schools
- 1 Grant-maintained integrated post-primary school
- 1 Special school

Additionally, 9 schools have been closed due to amalgamations in the last 3 years to form 4 new schools. This total is broken down as follows:

- 4 Maintained primary schools formed 2 new primary schools;
- 2 Maintained secondary schools and 1 voluntary grammar formed 1 new post-primary school;
- 1 Controlled secondary school and 1 voluntary grammar formed 1 new post-primary school.

Schools: OECD Report

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report which highlighted that students from Northern Ireland do not perform any better in international tests than those in other parts of the UK, despite consistently out-performing them in GCSEs and A Levels.

(AQW 5290/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a survey of the ability of 15-year olds to apply their reading, maths and science skills. The achievement of pupils here, and in England, Scotland and the south of Ireland, in reading and maths was not statistically different from the OECD average. Wales performed significantly below the OECD average. Performance in science was significantly above the OECD average; scores in England, Scotland and the south of Ireland were similar, but Wales performed significantly below the OECD average.

Looking at the proportion achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent), recent exams data indicates England is now almost 4% points ahead of us (79% compared to 75%). A slightly higher proportion of our pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C (or

equivalent) including GCSE English and maths (59.8% compared to 58.3%), but the rate of improvement in England was greater so the gap is closing, standing at 1.5% points in 2010/11, down from 5.1% points in 2009/10.

While we have a similar exams system to England and Wales, it is much more informative to compare our system with the top performing systems internationally. We lag behind the highest performing countries and we still have too strong a link between disadvantage and underachievement.

The outcomes from surveys such as PISA, along with exams data and inspection evidence, show the continued need to raise standards further, especially in the economically important skills of literacy and numeracy. That is why I am stepping up implementation of a range of policies aimed at tackling the root causes of underachievement and improving educational outcomes for all our young people.

Money more Primary School

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the current status of the traffic management proposals at Money more Primary School; and whether these works are included in the Minor Works Programme for 2011/12.
(AQW 5295/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board who have responsibility for carrying out minor works at Money more Primary School have confirmed that work to provide a traffic management scheme commenced on site on Monday, 28 November 2011 and is due for completion by 31 March 2012.

Schools: Holiday Schedule

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education what consideration his Department has given to encouraging all schools to observe the same holiday schedule to enhance the efficient and effective delivery of (i) school transport; (ii) meal provision; and (iii) childcare arrangements for parents who work.

(AQW 5300/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department recognises the desirability of having standardised school holidays and dates are agreed each year with a group representing all school sectors and are harmonised to take account of the availability of school transport and meal services. This contributes towards economical and efficient provision of support services. However, schools retain the flexibility to operate on these dates at their own discretion to arrange staff training days and to close for occasional days to meet their own specific circumstances.

DE: Irish Translation

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of translating and publishing his Department's documents in Irish in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5302/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost of translating and publishing the Department of Education's documents in Irish in each of the last five years, was as follows:

	Cost (including publishing of bilingual Irish/English documents)
2006/07	£5,361
2007/08	£16,313
2008/09	£67,340
2009/10	£68,105
2010/11	£111,508

Since 2008 the Department of Education has employed Irish Language Officers to facilitate its use of Irish. The Irish Language Officers have undertaken a range of duties, including urgent translation work. The costs incurred in carrying out specific tasks are not separately calculated.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages places obligations on Government Departments to promote and encourage the use of regional or minority languages in public life. There are duties under the Good Friday Agreement in relation to linguistic diversity, including the Irish language. The St Andrew's Agreement also refers to the need to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. There are a significant and growing number of Irish speakers in the north of Ireland and there is an increasing demand for Irish medium education. My Department's use of Irish reflects the need to communicate with Irish speakers in their language of choice.

DE: Translation of CCEA Documents

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of publishing and translating the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment documents, including exam papers and support material, in Irish, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5303/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the costs for the period 2006/07 to 2010/11 which the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment have spent on publishing and translating documents in Irish.

Financial Year	Cost
2006-2007	£98,028
2007-2008	£75,858
2008-2009	£152,578
2009-2010	£455,213
2010-2011	£598,828

CCEA: Funding Returned

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of monies returned to his Department from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5304/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During the period 2006/07 to 2010/11, CCEA declared the following reduction in budget requirement to the Department of Education:

Financial	Total
Year	£000s
2006/07	1,962
2007/08	0
2008/09	1,331
2009/10	1,123
2010/11	1,385

Schools: Transport Policy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what action his Department has taken in response to the Motion, as amended, on 11 October 2011 on the creation of a holistic and sustainable school transport policy.

(AQW 5308/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the debate on the home to school transport policy in the Assembly on 11 October 2011, I have been considering the nature, timescale and format of what will be a complex review. I will announce the arrangements and terms of reference in due course when I have thoroughly considered the matter.

Post-primary Schools: STEM Subjects

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the uptake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects in the (i) 2008/09; (ii) 2009/10; and (iii) 2010/11 academic years.

(AQW 5309/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Mathematics is a compulsory element across all key stages of the revised curriculum which was introduced in schools here on a phased in basis from September 2007 – June 2010. Science and Technology is covered through the World Around Us in the primary curriculum and is a specific area of learning in the post-primary curriculum, including at Key Stage 4. Therefore, our expectation is that all pupils will, from September 2010, have been studying STEM-related areas at all stages of the revised curriculum.

Additionally, we are able to monitor the specific uptake of STEM subjects at GCSE and A level and the details of examination entries in STEM subjects are provided in the table below.

GCSE and A level STEM subject entries, 2008/09 - 2010/11

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
GCSE STEM entries	70,542	70,248	70,404
A level STEM entries	11,504	12,289	12,711

Source: RM Data solutions

- 1 The STEM subject classifications are based on those in Annex 2 of the 2009 Report of the STEM review for the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning.
- 2 The tables represent GCSE and A level entries in STEM subject areas.
- 3 The data does not include equivalent qualifications.

Shared Future: Schools

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office, or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.

(AQW 5310/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A Shared future set out a vision for a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of human rights for all.

Much of the work of my Department supports this vision by ensuring children and young people can fulfil their full potential and take their place as contributors to society and the economy, founded on partnership, equality and mutual respect.

My Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy, which was launched in March, has the specific aim of contributing to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self-respect and respect for others, promote equality and work to eliminate discrimination. The policy includes a commitment that as new policies are developed or existing policies reviewed, the potential to impact positively on CRED issues will be considered.

The draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes and to substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015. This will deliver educational benefits in terms of raising standards and more efficient use of resources, as well as building good relations.

All Departments are required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. In keeping with this statutory duty, my Department already considers how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations.

This approach to mainstreaming good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will further be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

DE: PFI Projects

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many Private Finance Initiative capital projects his Department has agreed for new builds for schools in the next three financial years.

(AQW 5323/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In March 2011 my Department approved the Full Business Case for the Lagan College and Tor Bank Special School Public Private Partnership (PPP) project, which was the last of a number of earlier announced PPP projects to reach contract signature. The new school building for Tor Bank will open in October 2012, with new and refurbished school buildings for Lagan College opening in June 2013.

My Department has not announced any new Private Finance Initiative / PPP projects since 2004.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the cost to bring Bangor Central Integrated Primary School's buildings up to standard.

(AQW 5324/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current estimated cost to bring Bangor Central Integrated Primary School's buildings up to standard is £144k. This figure is based on the maintenance backlog derived from the Schools' Estate Management System. This backlog figure is the 'make good' cost for the components of the school that are deemed to be in poor or very poor condition.

Almost £500k has been spent to date on significant minor works and maintenance at the school over the past 4 financial years.

Post-primary Schools: Careers Guidance

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how the Education and Training Inspectorate measures the success and outcomes of careers guidance in schools.

(AQW 5346/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluate the quality of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) as an integral part of all inspections of post-primary schools. They do so using the inspection framework supplemented by a range of quality indicators which reflect fully the joint DEL and DE Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) strategy 'Preparing for Success'.

E-schools Project

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of the e-Schools Project in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5348/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work on the e-schools project commenced in April 2008. The costs associated with the project from this date are:

	Capital	Resource	Total
2008/09	£1,760,000	£179,000	£1,939,000
2009/10	£96,000	£202,000	£298,000
2010/11	£745,000	£572,000	£1,317,000

Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the value of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme as a development programme for young people.

(AQW 5409/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is one of a number of programmes that provide young people with access to a range of positive developmental opportunities. It is a programme used in formal and non formal education. The balanced programme of activity helps the young person to develop a range of skills in an environment of social interaction and team working. Children and young people can access the Scheme through a number of organisations including schools and youth groups. By participating, young people enhance their life and employability skills, as well as improving their physical and mental well-being through the pursuit of a series of personal goals in volunteering, physical activity, practical skills and the completion of an adventure expedition. The Scheme is supported by the Education and Library Boards and the Youth Council. In 2011/12 the Youth Council provided £66,000 to the scheme as part of its Infrastructure Support Funding.

DE: Sale of Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the powers that the Education and Library Boards have to sell land and to where the proceeds of such sales are allocated.

(AQW 5412/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Article 106 of the 1986 Education and Libraries Order gives Education and Library Boards, with the approval of the Department of Education, the power to dispose of land.

Since the 2007/08 financial year the Department of Education's annual capital budget allocated from Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP) has been gross of receipts - this means an estimated amount has been included in the allocation and assumes that receipts will be received in-year to the value of this estimated amount. However, as the actual capital receipts have been substantially lower than this estimated amount in recent years, the Department has in turn made capital allocations to the Voluntary Sector, the Education & Library Boards and internal DE capital requirements net of capital receipts, i.e. excluding this estimated amount. Funding released as and when actual capital receipts are received by the Department is then redistributed to meet pressures existing at that time throughout the overall Departmental capital budget.

Schools: Irish

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of Irish currently being taught in English-medium (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools.

(AQW 5493/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Modern languages are a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3, and a qualification choice at Key Stage 4 and sixth form. Schools can choose to deliver any of the languages of the 27 EU member states, including Irish. However, it is up to individual schools to decide which languages they choose to offer to meet the needs of their pupils.

The Department does not hold information on the languages schools choose to teach in Primary Schools or up to Key Stage 3 in Post-Primary schools. However, we do have information on Key Stage 2 assessments in Irish returns for 2010/11, examination entries for Irish in 2010/11 and the number of schools delivering Irish through the Entitlement Framework. Therefore I can confirm that there are 851 schools in Key Stage 2 dataset in total, of which 831 of these are English Medium. 9 of the 831 EM schools made returns in respect of KS2 assessments in Irish – 93% of these pupils achieved level 4 or above.

There was 1656 entries in GCSE Irish across 67 English medium schools, 49 entries in Gaelige from English medium schools and 273 entries in A level Irish across 49 English medium schools.

There are currently 76 English Medium schools delivering Irish through the Entitlement Framework ranging from Level 1 (entry level), Level 2 (GCSE) and Level 3 (A Level).

To support primary schools wishing to deliver language learning the Primary Language Programme was introduced in 2007 to give pupils at Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language in school. The programme offers primary schools the opportunity to work with peripatetic language tutors to deliver Irish, Spanish and Polish. As at 30 November 2011, 85 schools are learning Irish through this programme.

In addition, we have also commissioned an Irish language primary pilot programme for pupils in Key Stage 2 which aims to build upon and complement the provision made available via the Primary Languages Programme. The programme involves 10 primary schools in the Derry/North West area and will run for 4 years.

Department for Employment and Learning

DEL: Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list all the current public contracts within his Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender. (AQW 4214/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): A list setting out all current public contracts within the Department for Employment and Learning, the name of the contractor in each case, and the means of advertising the contract has been placed in the Library and is available on my Department's website [http:// www.delni.gov.uk](http://www.delni.gov.uk)

DEL: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007. (AQW 4751/11-15)

Dr Farry: A table detailing all public appointments made by me and my predecessors since May 2007 has been placed in the Library and is available on my Department's website <http://www.delni.gov.uk>.

DEL: Capital Small Grants Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what capital small grants schemes are available from his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, for a group to create a garden, at a residential home, for the benefit of people with disabilities. (AQW 4837/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are no capital small grants schemes available from my Department or its arm's length bodies for a group to create a garden, at a residential home, for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Universities: Student Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he would consider providing additional funding for students who wish to enrol in courses in England, Scotland or Wales which are not available at Northern Ireland universities, so that they are not financially disadvantaged because they have to pay higher fees than students at Northern Ireland universities. (AQW 4875/11-15)

Dr Farry: From academic year 2012/13 my Department will provide increased tuition fee loans of up to £9,000 for eligible students from Northern Ireland who opt to study in Great Britain. These tuition fee loans are not means-tested and repayment of the loans will commence in the April following completion of the course, subject to the borrower earning above a specified threshold. The threshold in 2012 is £15,795 and this will increase annually in line with inflation. In addition, all eligible students will continue to be able to apply for support with living costs. This support is provided through a combination of grants and loans depending on the borrower's circumstances.

It is simply not affordable for my Department to introduce a similar model to that announced by the Welsh Government from academic year 2012/13, under which Welsh students will receive a non repayable grant to cover the difference in the current fee level and the fee which universities can charge from 2012/13.

Unlike Wales, where enrolments show a significant number of incoming students (and therefore fee income) from other parts of the UK, Northern Ireland is a net exporter of undergraduate students. Indeed enrolment data for academic year 2008/09 show that almost 4,000 Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled on first-year, full-time degree courses elsewhere in the United Kingdom. By comparison, just over 200 students domiciled in other parts of the UK enrolled at higher education institutions in Northern Ireland.

In the context of the budget pressures that my Department is already facing in this comprehensive spending round, this information was key in informing the conclusion that such an approach would not be affordable

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether people in receipt of jobseeker's allowance are required to undertake unpaid work experience placements; and (ii) if so, to detail the number of (i) jobseekers who have undertaken placements in the last 12 months; and (ii) hours they were required to work. (AQW 4881/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) Those aged 18 to 24 who have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for six months or more and those aged 25 or over who have been claiming JSA for 18 months or more are mandated to participate in the Steps to Work (StW) programme which aims to assist people who are unemployed or economically inactive find and sustain employment.

As part of the StW programme some participants may be required to undertake a work experience placement arranged by a provider contracted to deliver StW. Participants on a work experience placement are paid a Benefit Based Training Allowance. This is equivalent to their former rate of Jobseeker's Allowance, plus a weekly top-up payment of £15.38.

- (ii) (i) During the period 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011, the latest period for which validated statistics are available, a total of 6,813 JSA claimants were required to take up a work experience placement on the StW programme. In addition 1,663 JSA claimants participated on a voluntary basis. All participants were paid a Benefit Based Training Allowance.
- (ii) JSA benefit claimants attending a work experience placement on StW normally undertake 30 hours per week. However, JSA benefit claimants with health conditions or caring responsibilities are able to reduce their hours of attendance in line with any restrictions set out in their Jobseekers' Agreement, drawn up when making their claim for JSA.

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 4236/11-15, to detail the occupations of the remaining 15 members of the Board of Governors of St Mary's University College, Belfast.

(AQW 4887/11-15)

Dr Farry: St Mary's University College has advised me that the occupations of the remaining 15 members of the Board of Governors of the College are as follows:

Barrister at Law	2
Civil Servant	1
College Principal	1
College Deputy Principal (retired)	1
College Lecturer	1
School Principal	1
School Principal (retired)	2
School Teacher (retired)	1
Solicitor	1
Student Union President	1
University Lecturer	2
University Pro Vice Chancellor	1
Total	15

St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 4225/11-15, what percentage of the annual income of St Mary's University College, Belfast comes from (i) his Department; and (ii) earned sources; and to detail the figures for both St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast for the last three years.

(AQW 4888/11-15)

Dr Farry: Based on the information contained in the published financial statements for both University Colleges, the table below details for the last three academic years the non-capital percentage income from Departmental, earned and tuition fee sources.

Funding Percentages	Stranmillis			St. Mary's		
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Departmental Funding	58%	58%	54%	64%	63%	61%
Tuition Fees	24%	26%	27%	25%	28%	31%
Earned Income	18%	16%	19%	11%	9%	8%

Bridge to Employment Programme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have gained employment as a result of the Bridge to Employment Programme.

(AQW 5003/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of people who have gained employment as a result of Bridge to Employment since 2006/07 is set out overleaf:

Year	Numbers starting training	Number successfully completing training	Number obtaining employment
2006/07	623	547	473

Year	Numbers starting training	Number successfully completing training	Number obtaining employment
2007/08	679	611	537
2008/09	339	334	330
2009/10	420	411	402
2010/11	422	401	375
2011/12*	72	72	49

* figures for 2011/12 are from 1st April 2011 – 31st October 2011

Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College, Belfast: Refurbishment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 4320/11-15, how much of the funding for the refurbishment of Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College, Belfast came from (i) his Department as capital investment; and (ii) earned income.

(AQW 5056/11-15)

Dr Farry: The funding associated with the amount spent by the two university colleges in the last three academic years on enhancing or refurbishing their learning and teaching areas is shown in the table below. This is broken down into that received from the Department as capital funding and that provided from the university college's reserves.

St Mary's College	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Funded by the Department	£49,774	£411,061	£233,323	£694,158
Funded from College Reserves	£8,783	£90,494	£290,171	£389,448
Total Spend	£58,557	£501,555	£523,494	£1,083,606

Stranmillis College	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Funded by the Department	£224,264	£169,775	£588,741	£982,780
Funded from College Reserves	£158,033	£799,919	£10,420	£968,372
Total Spend	£382,297	£969,694	£599,161	£1,951,152

DEL: Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost to his Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 5066/11-15)

Dr Farry: The cost to this Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years is shown below.

Year	£
2009-2010	450,526
2010-2011	460,390

DEL: Neighbourhood Renewal Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why his Department is not involved in the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme for the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor; and what plans he has to address this situation.

(AQW 5068/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to tackling disadvantage whether in Neighbourhood Renewal areas or elsewhere. While the Department does not fund Neighbourhood Renewal services, per se, it delivers a range of programmes related to employment and skills which aim to address disadvantage and are targeted at the needs of individuals, many of whom live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Regarding the Department's engagement with Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, this should take place at local level between the Partnership and its local office network management on employment-related issues.

DEL officials attended meetings of the Kilcooley Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership until December 2009. At that time the economic downturn created additional pressures for the local office network and it was no longer possible to attend Partnership meetings but staff remained available to discuss issues relevant to DEL when these arose. I understand that Kilcooley produced an Action Plan for 2007-10 but it was not received by my Department.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on Education Maintenance Allowance in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5096/11-15)

Dr Farry: The following payments were made by my Department in respect of means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance in each of the last three financial years:

2008/09	£20,706,000
2009/10	£23,594,000
2010/11	£25,985,000

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the employment and recruitment at St Mary's University College, Belfast, broken down by the number of (a) staff; and (b) new recruits from the (i) Protestant community; and (ii) Roman Catholic community, in each year since the college adopted its Equal Opportunities Employment Policy Statement in 1998.

(AQW 5112/11-15)

Dr Farry: St. Mary's University College has provided the information attached at Annex A.

Annex A

St. Mary's University College

Composition of Staff by Community Background

Monitoring Year	No. of Catholic Staff	No. of Protestant Staff	No. of Non-Determined Staff	Total Staff
Feb. 2011	151	12	6	169
Feb. 2010	149	11	9	169
Feb. 2009	155	11	7	173
Feb. 2008	167	13	7	187
Feb. 2007	160	11	7	178
Feb. 2006	158	8	7	173
Feb. 2005	162	8	8	178
Feb. 2004	162	10	6	178
Feb. 2003	157	11	5	173
Feb. 2002	155	8	0	163
Feb. 2001	157	7	3	167
Feb. 2000	162	5	2	169
Feb. 1999	160	3	1	164
Feb. 1998	151	1	1	153

St. Mary's University College

Composition of Appointees by Community Background

Month & Year	No. of Catholic Appointees	No. of Protestants Appointees	No. of Non-determined Appointees
Feb. 2011	20	0	1
Feb. 2010	13	0	2
Feb. 2009	7	0	0
Feb. 2008	14	2	0
Feb. 2007	25	3	0
Feb. 2006	19	1	1
Feb. 2005	19	3	3
Feb. 2004	19	1	1
Feb. 2003	16	3	1
Feb. 2002	20	2	2
Feb. 2001	8	4	2

Month & Year	No. of Catholic Appointees	No. of Protestants Appointees	No. of Non-determined Appointees
Feb. 2000	14	5	1
Feb. 1999	23	2	1
Feb. 1998*			

* Breakdown cannot be found for this year.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 4844/11-15, whether the Governors and management of Stranmillis University College were aware that the Chair of the Board of Governors was to give a media interview; and whether the Chair's remarks were agreed prior to the interview.

(AQW 5121/11-15)

Dr Farry: Stranmillis University College is an autonomous body. As such the College's Governing Body is responsible for its own actions. The Governing Body's and the Chair's roles and responsibilities are laid down in its Articles of Government. The manner in which the Governing Body conducts its business, including the giving of media interviews, is a matter for the Governing Body.

Agency Workers: Maternity Rights

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the maternity rights that are afforded to agency workers as a result of the introduction of the Agency Workers Directive.

(AQO 900/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 are due to come into operation on 5 December 2011. The Regulations will provide additional protections for temporary agency workers, including new rights for pregnant workers and new mothers. The intention of these provisions is to allow women to continue to work during pregnancy, and to ensure that they are not treated unfairly because of their pregnancy.

Most of the new rights provided by the Regulations will accrue following a 12-week qualifying period. After completing this qualifying period, pregnant agency workers will be allowed paid time off to attend ante-natal medical appointments and ante-natal classes when on assignments.

In addition, if a pregnant agency worker can no longer complete the duties of her assignment for pregnancy-related health and safety reasons, she has the right to be offered suitable alternative work. This alternative work must be paid at a rate that is not substantially less favourable than the rate for the previous assignment, which was terminated on pregnancy-related grounds.

If suitable alternative work cannot be found, the pregnant woman will have the right to be paid by the agency for the intended duration of the original assignment.

In addition, there will be no detriment to the accrual of equal treatment rights as a result of a maternity-related absence, up to a maximum of 26 weeks after childbirth.

Queen's University, Belfast: Student Plus Programme

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the range of services offered as part of the Student Plus programme at Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQO 903/11-15)

Dr Farry: Student Plus is a web based service provided by Queen's University for potential and existing students. The University has advised that the Student Plus programme consists of seven areas which are involved in all aspects of the student journey and student life, beginning with the application and admissions process and culminating in the student graduating with a degree from the University. The seven units which make up the programme are: Marketing; Student Recruitment and Admissions; the Students' Union; Accommodation and Hospitality; Queen's Sport; Culture and Arts; Childcare; and Eventus (events, conferences, ceremonial and timetabling).

Higher Education: Student Flows

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action is being taken by his Department to increase third-level student flows on a North/South basis.

(AQO 904/11-15)

Dr Farry: I and my Department remain committed to ensuring that students from Northern Ireland continue to have a free choice of academic institution within the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere and I welcome the opportunity to explore any factors that may restrict Northern Ireland students in that choice.

In academic year 2009/10, across all levels of study, there were 1165 Northern Ireland domiciled undergraduates enrolled on Higher Education courses in the Republic of Ireland and 3800 undergraduate students from the Republic of Ireland enrolled at Northern Ireland higher education institutions.

I met recently with Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills, to discuss collaborative working on a number of important matters of mutual interest. My officials have also met with their counterparts in the Department of Education and Skills, with the intention of mapping out the extent of existing co-operation and developing a collaborative work programme for the future.

That future work programme could include increased collaboration on higher education issues, closer co-operation on Research & Development and the issues surrounding 'A' Level equivalence.

Furthermore, following the publication of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation and the Confederation of British Industry (IBEC-CBI) Joint Business Council Report, 'A Study of Obstacles to Cross-border Undergraduate Education', the Irish Business and Employers Confederation has proposed the establishment of a forum to discuss the outcomes of the report and I have agreed that my Department will be represented on this forum.

Employment Skills

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he would consider establishing a funding package to support organisations that work with schools to help develop employment skills, to complement the work of the Department of Education.

(AQO 905/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have no plans to fund any additional packages to support organisations currently working with schools.

Resources were made available to further education colleges through the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) pilot, which ran from 2004 to 2008.

The Vocational Enhancement Programme was aimed at stimulating collaboration between schools and further education colleges, and other training providers, to increase the vocational curricular offer to young people.

The Department of Education currently provides additional ear-marked Entitlement Framework funding to schools. This presumes that there may be additional costs associated with planning and delivering an expanded curricular offer through collaboration with others.

The Entitlement Framework was introduced by the Department of Education in 2007/08, and is funded solely by that Department. The Entitlement Framework requires schools to offer a pupil-centric curriculum, one third of which has to be vocational in nature. Good practice dictates that schools should ascertain from their pupils where their interests lie, and do all that is reasonably practical to provide access to appropriate courses. This can be either in the school, or in collaboration with others including further education colleges and training providers. The two Departments continue to work closely on a framework that supports local collaboration between post primary schools, further education colleges and training providers. This ensures that the needs of learners are central to our thinking.

Step Ahead Programme

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his plans to fill the void left by stopping the Step Ahead strand of the Steps to Work programme.

(AQO 906/11-15)

Dr Farry: Those jobseekers who can no longer avail of Step Ahead due to the present pause in recruitment will, of course, be able to avail of the full range of provision currently on offer through the Steps to Work programme. This includes the opportunity to undertake meaningful and relevant work experience placements; support to gain a work related qualification; assistance with improving the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT; and assistance for those participants who wish to become self-employed. Help is also available to develop skills needed to search for, and sustain, employment for example interview skills, jobsearch skills, CV preparation.

Voluntary and community organisations will also be able to offer work experience placements to Steps to Work participants who are interested in gaining work experience within that sector.

It is regrettable that it was necessary to introduce a pause on recruitment to Step Ahead. As previously stated, should additional resources become available later this financial year, I would intend to restart recruitment to this strand of provision, although this may be on a more selective and targeted basis.

I am also awaiting the outcome of a bid to the Social Protection Fund which would enable me to introduce a variant of Step Ahead targeted at assisting the young unemployed, lone parents and those affected by the Incapacity Benefit re-assessment process.

Finally, I can assure the Member that no unemployed person seeking work will be denied the opportunity of a place on the Steps to Work programme.

Unemployment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his target for a reduction in unemployment levels by the end of the Programme for Government period.

(AQO 907/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no target for a reduction in unemployment in Programme for Government nor does my Department have a target for reducing unemployment as we have no control over this. However, one of the key areas of work for my Department is to help people who are or become unemployed to find a job. This is particularly important given the current difficult economic and labour market conditions. This is why we put a target into the Programme for Government for my Department to support people into employment. We aim to assist at least 114,000 benefit claimants into work over the period of the Programme for Government. The purpose of the Employment Service and my Department's Programmes such as Steps to Work is to help those who are at a disadvantage in the labour market to compete for jobs. By preparing benefit claimants for work, we will ensure that they do not become detached from the labour market and slip into long-term benefit dependency. This will benefit the people themselves and their families, potential employers, and society in general.

Schools: Careers Provision

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the careers provision in schools, to equip students with employability skills.

(AQO 908/11-15)

Dr Farry: Responsibility for the equipping of students in schools with employability skills lies with their teachers and the Department of Education.

It is the role of the Education and Training Inspectorate to ensure the quality of careers education provision in schools. I understand that schools and colleges have adopted the Inspectorate Quality Indicators for careers education, information, advice and guidance.

The main function of my Department's Careers Service is in two distinct areas. The first, careers information, is to provide access to up-to-date labour market information and information relating to educational and training opportunities, to inform career planning and management.

The second, careers advice and guidance, is the provision of client-centred advice and guidance to assist in making appropriate career decisions and choices which are informed and well thought through.

'Preparing for Success' - the careers education, information, advice and guidance strategy and implementation plan, was published jointly by my Department and the Department of Education in January 2009. Its aim is to develop effective career decision makers leading to increased and appropriate participation in education, training and employment and to support the Department of Education's Revised Curriculum including the Entitlement Framework policies and my Department's Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The focus for the delivery of the joint careers strategy is initially five years and implementation is progressing well.

Agency Workers

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to ensure that agency workers are made fully aware of their rights in advance of the introduction of the Agency Workers Directive in December 2011.

(AQO 909/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 are due to come into operation on 5 December 2011, and will provide additional protections for temporary agency workers.

Following consultation with numerous stakeholders, the Department has developed and published extensive guidance on the Regulations. This guidance was shaped and informed by engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of workers. The guidance has also been issued to all relevant stakeholders, including those organisations that provide employment advice to workers.

The Department has also ensured that Northern Ireland's two main citizen and business-facing websites, NI Direct and NIBusinessInfo, have been updated with detailed information on the Regulations, including the additional rights of workers.

The Department is currently developing a short information leaflet, specifically designed for agency workers, which will set out in a concise form the rights available under the Regulations. It is anticipated that this information will also be made available in a range of different languages. In addition, the Department will be including information articles in a variety of community newsletters which are issued by ethnic minority groups, and can therefore be accessed by migrant workers.

Universities Ireland

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the work priorities of Universities Ireland.

(AQO 910/11-15)

Dr Farry: The stated work priorities of Universities Ireland for 2011-12 are to:

- promote, manage and secure business sponsorship for five North-South Masters scholarships for the 2011/12 academic year;
- promote and host three student debates by 30 April 2012 (the first of which took place on 10 November);
- facilitate one international conference focusing on high priority research or policy areas, such as North/South co-operation in the European Union's 7th Framework Programme for research and technological development, before 30 April 2012 (this has been replaced by an initiative bringing together the nine universities' Departments of History to plan a major inter-university programme to reflect on the 1912-1922 period in Irish history);
- promote and facilitate two Distinguished Speaker seminars by 30 April 2012 (this year, the Universities Ireland council has agreed that, rather than inviting overseas speakers to address them, they will go overseas to see how a successful university system is run – in this case, the Scottish university system);
- continue to provide administrative support for the Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building until 30 April 2012 (the last of six workshops in this initiative was held in September, and support for the initiative has now been given over to a consortium led by Dublin City University); and
- represent the Island of Ireland's higher education sector through the Scholars at Risk network for the period up to 30 April 2012.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the action his Department will take to ensure the long-term viability of Stranmillis University College, Belfast, should the proposed merger with Queen's University, Belfast not take place. **(AQO 911/11-15)**

Dr Farry: As I outlined in my Statement to the Assembly on 28 November, I will bring forward the legislation to enable the proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast as soon as I believe there is sufficient political support. In the absence of that support, however, the future outlook for Stranmillis is bleak should the proposed merger not proceed. I do not have any additional resources that could be diverted to Stranmillis nor would I favour such a move as it would continue to perpetuate the current inefficient system of training teachers in Northern Ireland.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: Business Loan Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the introduction of a business loan scheme was announced by the Chief Executive of InvestNI on a local radio programme; and for her assessment of whether this was an appropriate way for such an announcement to be made.

(AQW 3743/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The intention to introduce a business loan scheme has been the subject of much discussion for a number of months. Indeed, I first referenced it as far back as March of this year when I announced Invest NI's £30million development and £16million co-investment funds.

This Loan Fund will be an important element of Invest NI's wider Access to Capital strategy, and will be closely aligned with Invest NI's recently launched Boosting Business initiative which has been developed in direct response to the renewed economic downturn.

The Fund aims to generate £150 million sales growth per annum in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) safeguarding and creating over 2,000 jobs over a 10 year period. It will address a gap in the market for access to finance by complementing existing sources, including bank finance, venture capital and private equity finance.

Invest Northern Ireland will provide £25 million to the Fund, which is intended to be principally financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland, with a further £25m provided from the private sector.

Following the decision by NILGOSC to contribute, in principle, the £25m private sector investment to the Fund, I was able to announce on 25 November that the full funding was in place and that a public procurement process was being initiated to secure a professional fund manager.

It was therefore wholly appropriate for the Invest NI Chief Executive to reference it in a recent wide-ranging interview, where he was outlining the suite of support measures through which the organisation will support businesses to create and protect jobs, to build the skills of their workforce, to use new technology to improve their competitiveness, to create new products and take them to new markets.

Project 3113

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on Project 3113. **(AQW 3878/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: Project 3113 refers to the appointment of a fund manager for the proposed £30m Development Fund.

Four tender submissions were received and it was recommended that the contract be awarded to Crescent Capital on the grounds that they submitted the most economically advantageous tender.

Crescent Capital is now working to raise the required private funding match of £20m.

Power Cuts

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number and average duration of (i) planned; and (ii) unplanned power cuts in (a) 2009; and (b) 2010.

(AQW 4781/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not collect the data requested in this question.

Power Cuts

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of households that experienced (i) at least one unplanned power cut; (ii) at least one planned power cut; and (iii) a power cut of any description in (a) 2009; and (b) 2010.

(AQW 4784/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not hold the information requested.

Power Cuts

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of households affected by (i) unplanned; and (ii) planned power cuts lasting three hours or longer in (a) 2009; and (b) 2010.

(AQW 4788/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not hold the information requested.

Power Cuts

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the maximum duration of (i) an unplanned; and (ii) a planned power cut in (a) 2009; and (b) 2010; and the number of households affected.

(AQW 4791/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not collect the data requested in this question.

Renewable Energy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the percentage of energy that is currently generated from renewable sources.

(AQW 4847/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Renewable electricity generated in the current 2011/12 financial year has averaged 12.12% to end October 2011. For the month of October 2011, renewable electricity generation accounted for 17% of all electricity distributed in that month.

As part of the 2010 study into the potential development of the renewable heat market, an assessment was made on the total heat demand in Northern Ireland and the levels of renewable heat. It was determined that the heat demand in Northern Ireland is 17,362 GWh, of which 1.7% currently comes from renewable sources.

Sustainable Economic Development Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will consider working with the local banks to establish a Sustainable Economic Development Fund, with each bank making an annual investment which would be part of its contribution to the economic recovery.

(AQW 4897/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The availability of finance at reasonable terms is, strategically, a very important issue in Northern Ireland and is crucial for our economic recovery. While my Department has no statutory control of the banking sector, I and my officials have met with the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth.

In addition, my Department, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which supports the availability of capital within the local SME market. An important element of the strategy is the establishment of a £50m Growth Loan Fund which will help small and medium sized businesses with growth ambitions.

The Finance Minister has already been working with both government and the local banks to try to ensure that finance is available to businesses. In particular he has worked with the banks to ensure that the British Bankers' Association Business Finance Taskforce recommendations are implemented locally. These include making finance available through the Business Growth Fund which will see the banks providing up to £2.5 billion to invest in suitable businesses across the UK, including those

in Northern Ireland. The Finance Minister has also been engaging with the banks to ensure that increased mortgage lending is available to match the additional £10m funding provided by the Executive for the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Scheme this year to simulate some much needed activity in the local property market.

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many times Invest NI has sought the clawback of any assistance paid by it in each of the last five years; (ii) for what reasons; and (iii) how much has been successfully recovered.
(AQW 4908/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the last five financial years the number of clawback cases is as follows:

(i)

2006/7	48
2007/8	42
2008/9	56
2009/10	49
2010/11	77
Total	272

(ii) Clawback is triggered when a client company defaults on the terms and conditions of the grant offer. Common reasons for default include company closure or the failure to satisfy the conditions of offer.

(iii) £20.94 Million has been successfully recovered in relation to these 272 cases.

Geothermal Energy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what consideration her Department is giving to the development of geothermal energy sources; (ii) for her assessment of the extent to which electricity can be generated from geothermal sources; (iii) for an estimate of the scale on which geothermal energy could be harnessed for providing heating or electricity; and (iv) whether her Department has considered the possibility that chemicals left underground as a result of fracking would mean that an area could not be used to generate future geothermal energy.
(AQW 5044/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) My Department is committed to developing all forms of renewable energy in line with targets set in the Strategic Energy Framework of 10% renewable heat and 40% renewable electricity by 2020. Deep geothermal energy is already eligible for incentives in the form of Renewable Obligation Certificates for renewable electricity generation. In addition, my Department is considering how renewable heat from deep geothermal resource could be incentivised and had a call for evidence as part of the recent public consultation on the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive.

In addition, the Geological Survey is a partner in the IRETherm project, a programme of research into the deep geothermal energy resources in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; this is funded by Science Foundation Ireland and runs from 2011-15. This research is looking at the deep geothermal potential of the sedimentary basins and granites of Northern Ireland and will build on the results from previous research commissioned under the Innovation Fund.

(ii) Across the UK, the deep geothermal power sector remains at an embryonic stage. Currently there is only one geothermal plant in the UK, a heat only station in Southampton. It is expected that electricity generated from geothermal energy will make a very small, if any, contribution to Northern Ireland's overall electricity levels by 2020 given the high capital cost of development involved. The most efficient use of geothermal resources is for the production of both electricity and heat.

(iii) Previous studies have demonstrated that there is potentially significant geothermal resource that could be exploited in Northern Ireland primarily for renewable heat generation. Areas identified as having such resource include Ballymena, Ballymoney, Larne, Ballycastle, Bushmills and Antrim. The actual level of energy that could be exploited through deep geothermal would, of course, vary on a site-by-site basis.

(iv) My Department sees no reason why the presence of any fracturing fluids in gas shales should have any impact on the use of an area for future deep geothermal energy use. The shales would not be targets for deep geothermal energy and boreholes used for the extraction of geothermal energy would be isolated from the shale intervals by steel casing and cement.

Local Enterprise Agency Network

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's plans for the continued use of Local Enterprise Agency Network resources.
(AQW 5061/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and Invest NI continue to view Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) as key contributors to the delivery of economic development at both a local and sub-regional level.

The principal relationship with Invest NI is through the delivery of publicly procured and contracted programmes such as the Social Entrepreneurship Programme. Similar programmes are delivered for DEL. However my Department recognises that LEAs

have close links to many local stakeholders, including Councils and local chambers. As such, they are an important part of a wide enterprise network. They also hold a considerable property asset which provides a solid base for local businesses.

Indeed, recognising their importance, I welcomed the publication in 2010 of a Study into the Future Role of the Enterprise Agency Network. The "BDO study" was undertaken with considerable input of Councils, Invest NI and LEAs. Whilst the Study highlighted challenges for the network, it also pointed to areas of good practice and future opportunities. The original context of this study was against the background of Reform of Public Administration (RPA). With RPA now re-established within the Draft Programme For Government, this Study is once again timely and relevant.

With my encouragement, work is also being undertaken by Councils and Invest NI in relation to maximising the potential of the LED Measure for European Funding. This too is very relevant to LEAs. It will provide opportunities for them to tender for initiatives born out of this work.

So in summary, LEAs should be well positioned to continue to provide a key role in local economic development.

Go For It Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the arrangement of one in ten clients on the Go For It Programme being from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas will continue after the change in the programme provider.

(AQW 5062/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The question refers to an arrangement whereby one in ten clients on the former Go For It Programme should be from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA). In fact, no such arrangements existed on that programme, although NRA was acknowledged as a target group. However, as a result of the Jobs Fund initiative, there is even greater focus on Neighbourhood Renewal in relation to the Go For It Programme.

A specific element of the Jobs Fund is targeted at Neighbourhood Renewal areas through the provision of a business incentive grant of £1,000 to new business starts.

Invest NI is not currently delivering a Business Start Programme as it is prevented from doing so as a result of legal action. It has however put in place arrangements to respond to enquiries and to ensure that those individuals with an interest in establishing their own business are able to access relevant advice and guidance during the period of delay.

There is early evidence that the incentive based approach provided for by the Jobs Fund is encouraging individuals from NRA areas to consider self employment, and Invest NI is dealing with this appropriately.

With regard to the future delivery of a Business start Programme, the original invitation to tender made it clear that the programme should be accessible and deliver on Invest NI's equality and diversity agenda, including individuals living in NRA areas.

Local Enterprise Agencies

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role Local Enterprise Agencies will play in future economic development.

(AQW 5063/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and Invest NI continue to view Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) as key contributors to the delivery of economic development at both a local and sub-regional level.

The principal relationship with Invest NI is through the delivery of publicly procured and contracted programmes such as the Social Entrepreneurship Programme. Similar programmes are delivered for DEL. However my Department recognises that LEAs have close links to many local stakeholders, including Councils and local chambers. As such, they are an important part of a wide enterprise network. They also hold a considerable property asset which provides a solid base for local businesses.

Indeed, recognising their importance, I welcomed the publication in 2010 of a Study into the Future Role of the Enterprise Agency Network. The "BDO study" was undertaken with considerable input of Councils, Invest NI and LEAs. Whilst the Study highlighted challenges for the network, it also pointed to areas of good practice and future opportunities. The original context of this study was against the background of Reform of Public Administration (RPA). With RPA now re-established within the Draft Programme For Government, this Study is once again timely and relevant.

With my encouragement, work is also being undertaken by Councils and Invest NI in relation to maximising the potential of the Local Economic Development (LED) Measure for European Funding. This too is very relevant to LEAs. It will provide opportunities for them to tender for initiatives born out of this work.

So in summary, LEAs should be well positioned to continue to provide a key role in local economic development.

Invest NI

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of InvestNI's budget will be used to support and develop small and medium sized enterprises under the new Programme for Government.

(AQW 5089/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's role is to grow the economy by supporting new and existing businesses of all sizes and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland. In doing so, Invest NI does not have specific budget allocations set aside based on the size of the companies it supports.

In previous years, however, the majority of offers made by Invest NI have been directed towards Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs). Indeed, during the period 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2011, around 90% of the offers made to businesses by Invest NI were to locally-owned SMEs. Over the period, these offers amounted to circa £200million, 37% of the total assistance offered by Invest NI to businesses during that time.

Given that SMEs form the majority of Northern Ireland's business base, Invest NI expects that the majority of its offers will continue to be made to locally owned SMEs through the course of the new Programme for Government period, reflecting the trend over the last 5 year period.

Invest NI

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 3933/11-15, to detail (i) the level of investment; and (ii) the number of jobs promoted by InvestNI in each constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5091/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Table 1 below shows the (i) the level of investment, or assistance offered, by Invest NI and (ii) the number of jobs expected to be created, which are described as 'Jobs Promoted', by Invest NI clients that had an offer of assistance approved between 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2011, broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) and financial year. This represents the total amount of assistance that investors have been offered and the number of jobs that they plan to create over the lifetime of assisted projects.

The assistance offered by Invest NI has been presented in terms of employment-related projects and business development projects, such as R&D, training and trade development. Whilst not directly related to job creation, these activities will improve business competitiveness, enabling growth and thereby creating employment opportunities.

It should be noted that Government grant support is offered at the start of a project based on a company's commitment to create jobs. Based on these financial commitments, the company will then contract with Invest NI to create an agreed quantity of jobs, which will be delivered over an agreed period of time, which could be up to five years. If the company cannot fully deliver their commitments then all the assistance offered may not be paid.

It should also be noted that Invest NI does not allocate budgets by geographic areas such as PCAs. The geographic location of projects is determined by those businesses which bring forward projects suitable for Invest NI assistance and are based on their specific requirements.

Table 1: Invest NI Assistance Offered and Jobs Promoted in each PCA (1st April 2006 to 31st March 2011)

Pca	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		2010-11		Total	
	New Jobs	Assistance Offered (£m)	New Jobs	Assistance Offered (£m)	New Jobs	Assistance Offered (£m)	New Jobs	Assistance Offered (£m)	New Jobs	Assistance Offered (£m)	New Jobs	Assistance Offered (£m)
Belfast East	678	19.02	304	21.86	1,089	31.60	396	23.99	925	28.09	3,392	124.56
Belfast North	91	2.63	51	1.50	117	6.46	472	8.30	66	1.70	797	20.58
Belfast South	966	15.17	527	14.35	358	15.34	642	32.58	703	15.70	3,196	93.13
Belfast West	58	1.54	178	2.90	92	3.19	46	3.72	5	0.36	379	11.70
East Antrim	69	9.61	284	5.21	42	5.77	53	4.73	222	4.70	670	30.02
East Londonderry	56	1.66	389	4.77	58	2.32	73	12.37	63	1.54	639	22.66
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	722	7.32	250	9.38	397	7.62	149	5.46	198	2.99	1,716	32.76
Foyle	875	8.48	994	11.79	217	3.81	265	18.18	365	2.58	2,716	44.85
Lagan Valley	143	3.68	107	2.12	102	2.66	186	7.58	251	5.17	789	21.19
Mid Ulster	270	3.11	398	6.62	356	6.12	228	12.36	177	4.04	1,429	32.26
Newry & Armagh	424	4.35	427	6.69	928	9.42	135	5.76	613	6.78	2,527	33.01
North Antrim	246	3.86	95	4.15	191	2.58	42	6.15	106	6.22	680	22.96
North Down	255	1.38	60	1.79	91	1.98	172	2.72	25	0.50	603	8.38
South Antrim	48	0.72	65	3.58	212	7.48	134	5.46	715	12.06	1,174	29.29
South Down	93	0.75	61	1.34	569	9.24	148	4.38	115	1.14	986	16.84
Strangford	86	1.48	61	1.26	134	1.37	137	3.09	33	0.81	451	8.00
Upper Bann	147	5.04	102	3.72	269	15.54	713	19.14	116	6.34	1,347	49.78
West Tyrone	116	1.59	199	3.20	71	2.24	106	3.42	70	0.83	561	11.29
Unknown	0	2.52	0	4.71	0	6.03	20	0.27	545	6.27	565	19.80
Total	5,343	93.90	4,552	110.95	5,293	140.77	4,113	179.66	5,312	107.82	24,612	633.09

Notes:

- 1 New Jobs represents the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.
- 2 These figures include both projects that are specifically aimed at job creation and projects that are not; therefore, job numbers do not directly correlate with the assistance figures included in this table.
- 3 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI supported over 8,500 new locally-owned jobs indirectly through its Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) – formerly the Start A Business Programme. Between 2006-07 and 2008-09 almost £2.9m was offered to participants on this scheme; however, in 2009-10 the programme was amended to offer only advice and guidance and no monetary support. Table 2 shows the breakdown of these jobs by financial year and PCA.

Table 2: Invest NI estimated number of jobs supported through the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) 2006-07 to 2010-11 by PCA

PCA	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	TOTAL
Belfast East	59	84	68	58	92	362
Belfast North	58	77	63	78	108	383
Belfast South	81	86	73	76	120	436
Belfast West	81	85	61	62	78	368
East Antrim	104	97	65	56	68	389
East Londonderry	120	149	99	87	139	595
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	184	202	143	124	148	800
Foyle	125	164	97	74	84	545
Lagan Valley	81	78	53	58	94	364
Mid Ulster	141	166	105	124	181	718
Newry & Armagh	112	136	86	81	116	532
North Antrim	122	142	81	52	81	477
North Down	69	56	50	34	69	278
South Antrim	80	76	57	53	88	355
South Down	102	132	79	79	105	497
Strangford	80	72	47	42	76	317
Upper Bann	85	108	93	67	101	454
West Tyrone	121	148	109	111	134	623
Unknown	0	0	0	3	7	10
Total	1,806	2,058	1,431	1,321	1,888	8,504

Note: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

DETI: Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the cost to her Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 5103/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Reimbursements to staff, for mileage undertaken for official business travelling, cost the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment £167,840 in 2009/10 and £185,500 in 2010/11.

Programme for Government: DETI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the outcome of the pledge in the last Programme for Government to see 45 new businesses and 600 existing businesses become exporters.

(AQW 5119/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Within the last Programme for Government, Invest Northern Ireland was tasked with supporting the establishment of 45 start-ups with the potential to export outside of the UK (Global Starts) and also to support 600 companies to export for the first time. By the 31st March 2011, Invest NI had achieved both targets with the agency having supported 48 Global Starts and 727 companies to export for the first time.

Broadband: South Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the quality of broadband coverage in South Armagh.

(AQW 5135/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Pursuant to my response to AQW 1482/11-15, I would re-iterate that since December 2005, broadband services with download speeds of at least 512 kilobits per second (Kbps) have been available across the whole of Northern Ireland. These services, as is the practice globally, are delivered via a mix of technologies including fixed-line, fixed-wireless and satellite.

In December 2009, DETI embarked on the Next Generation Broadband project which, through extensive deployment of fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) technology, is delivering higher speed broadband services across Northern Ireland. While the specific objective of this project is to bring higher speed services to 85% of Northern Ireland businesses, under the wholesale arrangements set down by the contract with BT, other service providers can access the BT infrastructure to deliver their own brand of fibred broadband products, which also includes services aimed at residential customers.

Cabinet upgrades have been completed across some 36 areas in the Newry and Armagh Constituency making available broadband services with download speeds of up to 40 megabits per second (Mbps). Details of where the upgraded cabinets are located can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com or www.nibroadband.com.

For those areas where, due to the long line lengths between the premises and the exchange/and or cabinet, DETI has put in place a contract with Avanti Communications to deliver satellite broadband services with speeds ranging between 512Kbps and 3 Mbps. This contract is due to end in January 2012 and a procurement process is currently underway to put in place a new contract for delivery of services in areas currently unserved by fixed line technology. A requirement for higher specification services than those currently supported under the contract with Avanti have been specified by the Department as part of this procurement.

Locations across County Armagh have also benefited from a project supported under the NI Broadband Fund through which additional street cabinets have been fibre enabled across the Forkhill, Newtownhamilton and Crossmaglen exchange areas. Again, these upgrades facilitate the delivery of services of up to 40 Mbps.

Broadband: Newry

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the level of high speed broadband coverage in Newry.

(AQW 5136/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under my Department's Next Generation Broadband project, fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) technology offering download speeds of up to 40Mbps has been delivered to 19 cabinets serving Newry. While the specific objective of this project is to bring higher speed services to 85% of Northern Ireland businesses, under the wholesale arrangements set down by the contract with BT, other service providers can access the BT infrastructure to deliver their own brand of fibred broadband products, which also includes services aimed at residential customers.

In addition, BT continues to invest in rollout of fibre to the cabinet technology under its "business as usual" programme. Details of the locations of the cabinets upgraded under contract to my Department can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com. Details of the full fibre rollout (including those under BT's additional investment plans) in Newry can be found at www.nibroadband.com.

For those premises unable to access a high speed fixed line service, satellite services of up to 3Mbps are available through Avanti Communications under contract to my Department. This contract expires in January 2012 and a procurement process is currently underway to put in place a new contract. Higher specification services than those currently supported under the contract with Avanti have been specified by the Department as part of this procurement.

Giant's Causeway: Visitors

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of visitors to the Giant's Causeway in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 5142/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of visitors to the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, in each of the last ten years, is detailed below:

Year	Visitors
2001	383,133
2002	406,801
2003	398,977
2004	445,327
2005	464,243
2006	553,063
2007	712,714
2008	751,693

Year	Visitors
2009	714,612
2010*	464,195

* In 2010, the National Trust revised the methodology used to estimate visitor numbers.

Source: Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey. Participation in the NI Visitor Attraction Survey is voluntary. Statistics presented are given on the basis of information provided by the proprietors of attractions.

Sustainable Energy Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4714/11-15, what action she intends to take to encourage domestic energy suppliers to subsidise home insulation products through the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme, given that all current energy efficiency projects are means-tested and therefore of no benefit to middle-income families.

(AQW 5333/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently cash back offers of £150 on cavity wall insulation and £150 on loft insulation available from Power NI to all Northern Ireland households. Additionally improved offers including free insulation, supported by the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme which is run by the independent Utility Regulator, are available to qualifying households.

Department of the Environment

Septic Tanks

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of the number of homes with an outside septic tank; (ii) whether his Department has carried out research on the condition of these septic tanks; (iii) what levels of pollutants are leaked from outside septic tanks; and (iv) what action his Department is taking to ensure that new dwellings are not constructed until adequate sewerage structures are in place.

(AQW 2123/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) Water Management Unit (WMU) has responsibility for the protection of the aquatic environment.

Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, the consent of the Department of the Environment is required to discharge trade or sewage effluent to a waterway or water contained in underground strata. This includes the discharge of effluent from domestic septic tanks.

I hosted Good Beach Summits in June and September 2011, which identified the need for a project to further investigate the impacts, including the scale of problem, caused by discharges from septic tanks on bathing water quality.

- (i) There are currently approximately 108,000 septic tanks serving single domestic dwellings in Northern Ireland in possession of Water Order discharge consents. Following a pilot exercise last year, NIEA initiated a project in October 2011 to improve its information management system for septic tanks. This will include a mapping exercise to identify all discharges from single domestic dwellings that are not connected to the Northern Ireland Water foul sewerage infrastructure. On completion of the mapping exercise, a work stream will be developed to bring unconsented septic tanks into the regulatory control regime based on the areas of priority.
- (ii) NIEA has not carried out research on the condition of every individual septic tank with a discharge consent. NIEA have obtained funding to progress a major desktop and field study to identify and mitigate against pollution sources from septic tanks. Given the high numbers of septic tanks in Northern Ireland, this work will initially focus on areas of poor water quality, in particular, bathing waters at risk of failing the revised Bathing Waters Directive and for areas requiring high levels of protection for example Natura 2000 sites. NIEA have focussed its initial efforts at mapping septic tanks in the areas close to Brown's Bay, near Larne to determine if they have been consented and if they are compliant with the consent conditions.
- (iii) It is not common practice to take samples of the effluent from septic tanks serving single domestic dwellings, as the low flow from such systems makes obtaining a representative sample difficult. Rather, consent compliance is based on visual assessment. For those discharges not routinely monitored, a supplementary inspection/sampling programme is in place. At present regulatory effort in this area is being targeted at known problematic sites. Where these discharges are found to be non-compliant, or where through other fieldwork a problem is detected, appropriate action is taken by NIEA.
- (iv) Planning permission will only be granted for development relying on non-mains sewerage, where the applicant can demonstrate that this will not create or add to a pollution problem. Applicants are required to submit sufficient information on the means of sewage treatment to allow a proper assessment of such proposals to be made. A negative condition may be attached to a planning permission, requiring that development shall not take place until works to facilitate it, such as infrastructural improvements, have been carried out. Where a proposal involves an on-site treatment plant, such as a septic tank, a negative condition may be attached to a planning permission stating that the house should not be occupied until the relevant sewerage works are complete.

Planning Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the percentage of streamlined planning applications that were processed within 42 days in each of the last three years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 3014/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The percentage of streamlined planning applications that were processed within 42 days in each of the last three years, broken down by council area is set out in the table below.

% streamlined planning applications processed within 42 days

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Antrim	93	96	79
Ards	90	49	19
Armagh	94	44	6
Ballymena	96	73	38
Ballymoney	78	45	20
Banbridge	76	73	35
Belfast	100	86	34
Carrickfergus	N/A	89	65
Castlereagh	N/A	80	17
Coleraine	97	72	57
Cookstown	100	66	29
Craigavon	100	72	35
Derry	63	41	27
Down	97	58	25
Dungannon	98	83	52
Fermanagh	92	78	71
Larne	N/A	90	44
Limavady	87	60	30
Lisburn	95	44	22
Magherafelt	100	72	65
Moyle	100	39	22
Newry And Mourne	94	49	19
Newtownabbey	100	93	21
North Down	96	57	53
Omagh	98	46	37
Strabane	96	70	45

Noise Levels

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment what noise level is referred to in the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978, which states that plant and equipment must be situated, operated and maintained so as to prevent the transmission of noise or fumes to nearby dwellings, while the Environmental Health Department, Belfast City Council requires that noise from premises shall not be audible within any dwelling between 1900 hours and 0800 hours Monday to Saturday or at any time on a Sunday.

(AQW 3041/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Excessive noise can reduce quality of life, have a harmful impact on health and cause interference with communications. There are a variety of legislative controls which deal with noise in different circumstances. Some relate to noise from particular sources, while others such as the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 (PCLGO) have a more general application.

Your question raises two separate issues relating to noise control:

- (i) the noise level relevant to the powers to control noise contained in the PCLGO; and
- (ii) the requirements of the Environmental Health Department within Belfast City Council (BCC) in relation to restricting the hours during which noise must not be audible within a dwelling.

PCLGO

There is no fixed level of noise which constitutes a statutory nuisance in the PCLGO or in any other legislation. Individual circumstances differ and each case is judged on its merits. In deciding whether or not a noise amounts to a statutory nuisance, the environmental health officer has to consider the reaction of the average reasonable person to the noise, taking account of not only its volume, but also factors such as when and how often the noise occurs and the duration of the noise occurrence.

The PCLGO applies to noise occurring at any time of the day or night. Given the subjective nature of the statutory nuisance test, it is likely however that a lower level of noise will be deemed to constitute a nuisance if it occurs at night, as opposed to during the day, when ambient noise levels are usually higher.

BCC Environmental Health Department – Planning Requirements

As a Statutory Consultee, district councils assess all planning applications in respect of the range of matters which fall under their remit. In relation to noise, consideration is given to the potential noise impact both during the day and at night with further restrictions likely to be imposed, as appropriate, at times when residents are most likely to be disturbed.

In order to protect local communities and prevent loss of amenity, and in an effort to provide a consistent approach to noise control, the Chief Environmental Health Officers of the 26 councils in Northern Ireland have adopted a range of standard requirements in relation to planning applications including:

- (i) Standard planning conditions restricting noise activity to certain hours in order to prevent noise nuisance in nearby dwellings (for example, the 1900 to 0800 hrs Monday to Saturday and any time on Sunday restriction); and
- (ii) General planning informatives for plant and equipment to ensure that noise and fumes are not transmitted to nearby dwellings.

Dog Fouling

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how much each council has raised through Fixed Penalty Notices for dog fouling in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3058/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under Article 4 of the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 it is an offence to permit a dog to foul and the following table lists the amount raised through fixed penalties for that offence in each district council area in each of the last 5 years.

	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Antrim Borough Council	50	100	0	50	0	£200
Ards Borough Council	250	400	500	450	400	£2000
Armagh City and District Council	0	0	150	50	50	£250
Ballymena Borough Council	150	450	150	300	100	£1150
Ballymoney Borough Council	0	0	0	0	50	£50
Banbridge District Council	100	0	50	100	0	£250
Belfast City Council	4150	3350	4550	2150	5450	£19650
Carrickfergus Borough Council	200	250	150	0	0	£600
Castlereagh Borough Council	100	50	50	0	0	£200
Coleraine Borough Council	450	250	1850	1850	1600	£6000
Cookstown Borough Council	0	100	50	150	50	£350
Craigavon Borough Council	400	2950	2300	3400	2350	£11400
Derry City Council	0	0	50	0	50	£100
Down District Council	150	150	300	500	350	£1450
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	0	100	0	0	0	£100
Fermanagh District Council	0	0	0	0	0	0
Larne Borough Council	600	950	550	225	100	£2425
Limavady Borough Council	0	50	0	0	50	£100
Lisburn City Council	50	100	50	0	100	£300
Magherafelt District Council	200	100	50	0	0	£350
Moyle District Council	0	50	100	200	100	£450
Newry & Mourne District Council	0	50	50	50	200	£350
Newtownabbey Borough Council	3800	2350	1050	750	1450	£9400
North Down Borough Council	200	50	100	100	300	£750
Omagh District Council	150	0	200	100	0	£450

	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Strabane District Council	0	0	0	0	50	£50
Totals	£11000	£11850	£12300	£10425	£12800	£58375

Planning: George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the terms of reference of the Independent Review of the George Best Belfast City Airport's Planning Agreement; and (ii) the proposed timescale of the Review.

(AQW 3061/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials are currently considering a number of issues in relation to the process for modifying the Planning Agreement including the terms of reference for the public examination into the proposals and the appropriate procedure for conducting the examination. I will make the details of the process known, including the terms of reference, when I have decided on the appropriate way forward.

It is my intention that the process should be completed by early Summer 2012.

Industrial Effluent Spillages and Leakages

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many industrial effluent spillages and leakages into rivers have resulted in fish kills in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3066/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, it is an offence to discharge any trade or sewage effluent, including site drainage liable to contamination, to a waterway, or any water contained in underground strata, from any commercial, industrial or domestic premises, without the consent of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

The Agency initiates an investigation following a report of suspected pollution, which may come from a number of sources, such as members of the public or field staff working on behalf of NIEA.

In cases where a fishkill occurs, NIEA uses the following classifications to record the significance:

Slight: Less than 10 fish killed.

Moderate: 10 – 100 fish killed.

Major: More than 100 fish killed.

Table 1 below sets out the number of pollution incidents, where fishkills occurred, where the source was determined as Industrial.

Table 1 Source - Industry

Year	Fishkill Classification			Total
	Slight	Moderate	Major	
2006	0	1	1	2
2007	0	1	1	2
2008	2	0	4	6
2009	0	1	0	1
2010	5	1	0	6

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of heavy goods vehicles which had defects detected in each of the last three years; and (ii) of these, how many were dealt with by (a) warnings; (b) fixed penalties; and (c) fines.

(AQW 3087/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The numbers of heavy goods vehicles detected with mechanical defects in each of the last three years including those dealt with by warning, fixed penalties and fines is as follows:

Period	Apr 09 / Mar 10		Apr 10 / Mar 11	Apr 11 / Sep 11
Number of heavy goods vehicles which had defects detected	478*	524	943	552
Number dealt with by warnings	126*	Not Available	221	168
Number dealt with by fixed penalties	Scheme not Available			0

Period	Apr 09 / Mar 10		Apr 10 / Mar 11	Apr 11 / Sep 11
Number that received a Defect Notice and / or Prohibition Notice	352*	Not Available	722	384
Number also prosecuted	41*	Not Available	72	27

* Before April 2010, the number of warnings issued was not routinely collated but information on the number of defects dealt with by warnings was recorded for vehicles checked during the 2009 Goods Vehicle Compliance Survey.

Pomeroy Police Station

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether the dumping of material from the demolition of the Pomeroy Police Station in the GAA ground was compliant with planning controls; and whether all relevant consents were in place.

(AQW 3121/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The planning permission granted to Pomeroy Plunketts GAC in March 2010 under application I/2009/0242/F allowed for the infilling of land.

In accordance with the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, NIEA granted a paragraph 19 exemption to Pomeroy Plunketts GAC on 22 September 2011. This exemption allows for the infilling of land for the purposes of relevant work, in accordance with planning approval I/2009/242/F, using material in EWC codes 17-05-04 waste soil and stones and EWC 17 01 07 mixtures of concrete, bricks, tiles and ceramics other than those mentioned in 17 01 06. The final levels and dimensions must not exceed those granted on planning drawing 1916-D-011 (2) associated with planning approval I/2009/0242/F.

Extinct Plants and Species

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an estimate of the number of native plants and animal species which became extinct in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3165/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Extinction of a native plant or animal occurs when the last individual of that species dies. It is usually determined retrospectively and is done so using a scientifically robust methodology developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Coming to this conclusion requires expert knowledge, exhaustive surveys and usually a long period of biological records.

From time to time, species that have been judged extinct are re-found in the wild. Consequently, it is not possible to produce estimates of species extinctions on a five year basis but, as far as we know, no native species have become extinct over the past five years.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Republic towards the publication of Red Lists for particular groups of species. These lists are typically constructed on an island-of-Ireland basis. In addition, the Department is committed under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 to maintain lists of species considered important to conserve. As part of that process, which is broadly similar in methodology to Red Listing, it will report on any species judged to be extinct or at risk from extinction. NIEA will also continue to monitor species of conservation importance and develop plans to restore populations where this is necessary and appropriate.

Rivers and Waterways

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the quality of rivers and waterways.

(AQW 3183/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Monitoring of rivers and lakes is carried out by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Results are assessed against environmental quality standards contained in the Water Framework Directive (Priority Substances and Classification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011. Overall classification utilises a combination of biological, chemical and hydromorphological quality elements.

In 2009, 574 river water bodies and 21 lake water bodies were classified using a five band system comprising 'High', 'Good', 'Moderate', 'Poor' and 'Bad'.

Assessment is carried out on an annual basis and published in the NI Environmental Statistics Report. Figures for 2010 will be available in January 2012.

The numbers of water bodies in each class are shown in the following table.

Water Framework Directive Overall Classification for Rivers and Lakes 2009

Class	Number of River Waterbodies	Number of Lake Waterbodies
High	6	0
Good	140	5

Class	Number of River Waterbodies	Number of Lake Waterbodies
Moderate	258	7
Poor	142	3
Bad	28	6

Cars Registered

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many cars are currently registered.
(Aqw 3197/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under a formal agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport (DfT).

At 12 October 2011, there were 982,935 cars registered (but not necessarily currently licensed) in Northern Ireland.

Classic Cars Exempt From Road Tax

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of registered classic cars that are exempt from road tax.
(Aqw 3216/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under a formal agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport (DfT).

Classic Car is not a term used in the registration and licensing of vehicles. Vehicles which were constructed before 1 January 1973 and fall within a list of qualifying vehicles may be taxed within the Historic Vehicle Taxation class. Vehicles licensed within this tax class are exempt from paying vehicle excise duty but a valid nil licence disc must be displayed on the vehicle where it has not been declared off road.

Currently there are 10,173 vehicles on the DVA vehicles database within the Historic Vehicles taxation class. Of these vehicles 6,177 are currently licensed and the remaining 3,996 have a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) declaration in force.

Old Mill, Poyntzpass

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment to detail whether any nominations to list the Old Mill building in Poyntzpass were received prior to or during its demolition.
(Aqw 3218/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A member of the public contacted the Built Heritage Directorate of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on 8 August 2011, seeking the protection of the building, as they were concerned that the building was going to be demolished.

My office was also contacted by a member of this Assembly, having been approached by a member of the public seeking the listing of the 'Old Mill'.

Some, limited, partial demolition had already taken place by this time.

There is no legal requirement for an owner to seek permission to demolish an unlisted building

Old Mill, Poyntzpass

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Old Mill building in Poyntzpass was suitable for listed building status.
(Aqw 3219/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A senior Conservation Architect from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) visited the building on 8 August 2011. The evidence from site was considered along with initial research into the building's history, and this was evaluated by NIEA's 'Architect's Forum'. Its view was that the building did not merit protection by listing because it did not meet the 'special architectural or historic interest' test of the legislation.

Research identified that the building was not a mill but a large storage building associated with the nearby Newry Canal.

River Pollution

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress made against each of the 21 recommendations of the 1998 Northern Ireland Audit Office report 'Control of River Pollution in Northern Ireland'.
(Aqw 3220/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On 30 April 1998 Mr John Dowdall, head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), reported to Parliament on his examination of:

- a) the organisation of water quality management functions in Northern Ireland;

- b) the performance of DOE's Environment and Heritage Service, now Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in the discharge of its responsibility for water pollution control in inland waterways; and
- c) the effectiveness of measures employed by the Department of Agriculture to prevent pollution from farm sources.

The report, "Control of River Pollution in Northern Ireland" set out the findings of the NIAO.

Departments do not routinely provide NIAO with a direct response in relation to any recommendations included in their report. However, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) conduct a hearing based on the report and following this issue their own report and conclusions which may cover some of the recommendations already made in the NIAO report. The NIAO report, "Control of River Pollution in Northern Ireland" was considered by the PAC on 23 November 2000.

On 27 April 2001 Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) (working with the Department) issued a Memorandum in response to the PAC report "Control of River Pollution in Northern Ireland" on the control of river pollution which responds to each of the PAC conclusions. Of the 25 PAC conclusions 21 were the responsibility of DOE to progress, 3 the responsibility of DARD and 1 the responsibility of DFP

In February each year NIAO contact the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) requesting an update on any further progress on the Control of River Pollution report and to reflect any further developments on the implementation of conclusions still to be achieved.

I have attached at Annex 1 a summary of current status of the 21 PAC conclusions that fall within the responsibility of DOE.

Annex 1

Accountability Grid

Date of Hearing 23 November 2000

Control of River Pollution in Northern Ireland Position at October 2011

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Current Status
7	DOE to publish a report 'A River Water Quality Monitoring Strategy for NI' to be made available on EHS Website by July 2001.	Achieved.
9	EHS to publish river reach targets by July 2001 and made available on EHS Website. DOE to publish the 2000 Water Quality Report in 2001 which will compare water quality against these targets.	Achieved. Achieved.
11	EHS to produce information on industrial discharge compliance statistics.	Achieved.
12	DOE to include in 2001/02 EHS Operational Plan a new target of 10% improvement in industrial compliance by 2004 in comparison with 2000 baseline.	Achieved.
13	EHS to give urgent consideration to practicalities and implications of introducing random sampling, including consideration of cost effectiveness. Where discharges not routinely sampled are found through other field work, the Department will ensure appropriate enforcement action is taken.	Achieved. Achieved.
16	DOE to produce a detailed written procedure for EHS and Field Staff by 1 May 2001 regarding the implementation of a trigger mechanism for prosecution of non-compliant dischargers.	Achieved.
17	EHS to complete the regulatory framework, including the development of environmental needs standards within the proposed timescales.	Achieved.
23	From 2001 EHS to publish a report on Water Service compliance on an annual basis and place a copy in the Assembly library.	Achieved.
24	EHS to strive to achieve a 4 hour response time to high and medium pollution incidents from 2002 onwards. EHS has set a target to assess and prioritise all reported incidents within 30 minutes. EHS to benchmark its performance against that of both the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, to ensure that any target in Northern Ireland is of a comparable standard.	Achieved. Achieved. Achieved.

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Current Status
25	EHS will examine the feasibility and resource implications of providing bailiffs with the necessary legal authority and the associated appropriate training, taking into account the health and safety implications associated with the use of volunteer assistance.	Achieved.
26	EHS will continue to make Water Service staff aware of their responsibilities to prevent pollution and to take appropriate action to rectify unsatisfactory discharges.	Achieved.
30	DOE to publish the proposed Consultation Paper in May and, subject to the Assembly's scrutiny, to have the farm pollution control regulations in place by the end of 2001.	Achieved.
31	DOE to introduce and operate the discharge consents charging scheme as soon as possible (scheduled for June 2001). DOE to achieve full cost recovery by April 2002.	Achieved. Achieved.
34	We were also told that a pro forma is now used to record costs. Consequently, EHS knows the full costs of clean up because it engaged in the first reactive action to the incident and is in a position to monitor the costs of clean-up at all stages. We welcome EHS's assurance that the new guidance to its agents will include all the points suggested in the C & AG's report.	Achieved. Implemented with effect from 1 April 2008
35	We welcome EHS's assurance that its emergency pollution team monitors all aspects of the clean-up operations conducted by third parties, including Water Service to ensure that they are appropriate.	The Department notes the Committee's comments.
36	DOE to continue to make appropriate representations to the Northern Ireland Courts Service regarding the level of fines.	Achieved.
37 and 38	DOE to consult with a range of parties regarding the future delivery of field services during 2001.	The proposal to transfer the field staff engaged in water pollution investigation and enforcement duties, on behalf of NIEA, from Councils' Group Environmental Health Committees (GEHC) to the Department of the Environment has not been completed due to consideration of a potential pension shortfall. Alternative options are now under consideration. In parallel, NICS has issued a draft Service Level Agreement to GEHC.
39, 41 and 42	Ministers to decide whether the issue of the future status of EHS should be addressed within the scope of the review of public administration or through the deferred quinquennial review.	The Minister of the Environment has put the concept of an independent environment agency back on the reform agenda. The purpose of the recent Environmental Governance discussion document was to test the water to establish firmly and directly what the community, stakeholders and others believe is best in going forward and to gauge if there is an appetite for structural reform leading to a truly independent environment agency - 83% of respondents to the initial discussion document exercise indicated support for the creation of an independent Environment Agency.

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Current Status
39, 41 and 42 <i>continued</i>	Ministers to decide whether the issue of the future status of EHS should be addressed within the scope of the review of public administration or through the deferred quinquennial review.	<p>In moving this issue forward it will be necessary to carry out a much more detailed consideration, taking into account the views of key interests and all of the relevant issues, including for example the impact on farmers, to ensure that any final proposals for the creation of an independent environment agency are robust, deliverable and most importantly will deliver improved and more efficient levels of environmental protection.</p> <p>An important element of any future work programme will be to complete a robust and fully costed business case. The business case will be essential to support final proposals to establish an independent environment agency.</p> <p>There will also be a full public consultation on any final proposals.</p>

EU: Recycling Obligations

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment whether Northern Ireland is meeting its recycling obligations as required by the European Union.

(AQW 3238/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The European revised Waste Framework Directive (rWFD) places a renewed emphasis on the importance of treating waste further up the waste hierarchy, away from disposal and towards waste prevention, recycling and reuse and energy recovery. New targets have been set to recycle 50% of household waste and 70% of construction and demolition waste by 2020.

Over the last 8 years, Northern Ireland's household recycling rate has increased by 27.5%. The most recent Northern Ireland household recycling rate for 2010/11 is 37.5%, an increase of 1.9% on the previous year. Provided the current rate of increase can be maintained Northern Ireland should be able to achieve the 2020 EU target of 50%.

My Department has completed a survey on Construction, Demolition and Excavation (CDE) waste, the results of this will be published shortly.

Village Scape Character

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to increase the number of villages designated as an area of Village Scape Character.

(AQW 3256/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage (March 1999) sets out the Department's planning policies for the protection and conservation of archaeological remains and features of the built heritage and advises on the treatment of these issues in development plans.

An addendum to PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage' entitled 'Areas of Townscape Character' was published in August 2005. The addendum, which should be read in conjunction with the provisions of PPS 6, provides additional planning policies relating to Areas of Townscape Character, for demolition of buildings, new development and the control of advertisements. The addendum advises that, for its purposes and those of other planning policy publications, all references to Areas of Townscape Character should be read as including Areas of Village Character.

Areas of Townscape / Village Character are designated in accordance with regional planning policy through the development plan process. The table below sets out the number of designations proposed in the four draft plans which are currently progressing through the development plan preparation process.

Draft Plans	Total No. of Areas of Village Character (AVC) / Areas of Townscape Character (ATC) Designations	No. of AVC / ATC Designations located in villages / small settlements
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan	100	14
Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan	35	13
Northern Area Plan	4	1
Magherafelt Area Plan	3	1

Red Squirrel Population

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to protect the red squirrel population in the North Down area. (AQW 3259/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In 2000 the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) published a Northern Ireland Species Action Plan for the red squirrel which identified the main threats to the species and proposed a series of measures which were aimed at conserving the remaining population. This plan was subsequently superseded by an all Ireland Red Squirrel Species Action Plan in 2008.

To further the conservation effort and to progress actions contained within the Species Action Plan, NIEA has taken on the role of chair of the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum. The forum brings together various organisations in order to develop and deliver best practice in red squirrel conservation.

Since taking on this role, NIEA has helped create, and subsequently supports, a number of local squirrel groups. These groups focus on local squirrel issues and provide regular updates to the forum. There are currently six groups active within Northern Ireland.

As a result of recent expressions of interest, NIEA is currently attempting to facilitate the creation of a squirrel group in the North Down and Ards Peninsula area.

Once established this group will help provide a more locally focused conservation effort in the area. Additionally, as members of the forum, the group will be able to network with those currently engaged in ongoing projects drawing on their experience of successful red squirrel protection measures and potentially accessing external funding.

DOE: October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round. (AQW 3262/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the October Monitoring Round, my Department did not identify any financial pressures which could be addressed solely through additional in-year funding, without creating a financial liability for future financial years.

Hare Survey

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has commissioned a re-analysis of the 2002-2010 hare survey data; (ii) if the re-analysis has been completed; and (iii) on what date any results will be made public.

(AQW 3304/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) commissioned Queen's University Belfast to carry out a retrospective analysis of the 2002-2010 Irish hare survey data. The project commenced in December 2009 and a report of the analysis was presented to NIEA on 31 August 2010. The report's findings and its implications for future Irish hare surveys have been carefully considered by NIEA and it will be available for download on the NIEA web site shortly.

DOE: October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round. (AQW 3324/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the October Monitoring Round, my Department has proactively taken steps to generate sufficient resources to fund a number of capital investment opportunities in relation to Rethink Waste and plant and machinery equipment for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

In addition, an easement has arisen as a consequence of slippage in the delivery of the Roe Valley Hydro Electric Scheme. Therefore, £0.4 million capital funding has been returned to the Executive.

Fly-tipping

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how many instances of fly-tipping were recorded in each of the last five years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 3347/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Six councils in Northern Ireland currently record incidents of fly-tipping via Flycapture. Flycapture is a web based fly-tipping database which is managed by the Environment Agency and provided to all Councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) only holds the figures for 2010/11:

Armagh	122
Ballymena	159
Banbridge	39
Larne	201
Newtownabbey	427
Strabane	867

The NIEA does not collect the figures for the other 20 Councils in Northern Ireland,

NIEA is currently in negotiations with councils on the subject of fly-tipping as a result of The Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and is endeavouring to encourage all Councils in Northern Ireland to record information on fly-tipping on the flycapture database.

Squirrel Numbers

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to provide the latest estimate of the population number of the (i) red; and (ii) grey squirrel.

(AQW 3420/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The latest estimate for the squirrel population dates from 2008. It estimates the all Ireland population of red squirrels to be 40,000, and the grey squirrel population to be 250,000. There are no recent estimates of the Northern Ireland population for either species.

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost to his Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3428/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following the publication of the Equality Commission's 'Review of the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' in November 2008 and its revised guidance to the Section 75 statutory duties in April 2010, the Department submitted its new Equality Scheme 2011-2016 to the Commission on 28 September 2011. The previous Equality Scheme was approved by the Commission on 8 February 2001.

As compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties is now mainstreamed into the Department's policy making processes, it is not possible to separately identify or disaggregate these costs.

DOE: Spend in Belfast City Council Area

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3497/11-15)

Mr Attwood: For 'direct spend' the table below outlines grants paid by the Department to Belfast City Council and to third parties within the Belfast City Council area. However, due to the historical nature of these payments, the detail of the grant payments in the early financial years 2001-04 is incomplete and therefore the overall total is likely to be understated.

The main element of the total (£59.7 million) relates to the de-rating element of the General Grant (£43.0 million). Other grants include those in relation to listed buildings, environmental protection, natural heritage and waste management.

It has not been possible to include in this answer grants paid to third parties within the Belfast City Council area where the funding would be used to provide services across other council areas; payments to suppliers of goods and services located within the Belfast City Council area; and the administration costs of departmental staff employed in delivering frontline services to citizens within the council area.

This information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost, as would the indirect spend incurred by the Department's Arms Length Bodies.

Year	Amount
2001/02	593,308
2002/03	1,096,709
2003/04	8,625,152
2004/05	9,034,804
2005/06	7,718,236
2006/07	7,540,455
2007/08	5,910,049
2008/09	6,715,424
2009/10	6,379,119
2010/11	6,059,705
Total	59,672,951

Planning Policy Statements: PPS 8

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to the issue of management companies in relation to PPS 8.

(AQW 3530/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement 8 – Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation states that planning permission will not be granted until the developer has satisfied the Department that suitable arrangements, such as management companies, have been put in place for the future management and maintenance in perpetuity of areas of open space required under the policy.

I am aware of the issue of management companies. The planning aspects of this matter are dealt with through Planning Policy Statement 8. However, it is clear that in the current economic environment, there are occasions where in practical terms issues are arising. I will consider the matter further but do so with caution as the issue of the future of management companies is beyond the authority of DOE.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 331/11-15, for an update on the on-going work between his Department and Ballymena Borough Council in relation to Arthur Cottage, Ballymena.

(AQW 3532/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has continued to liaise with counterpart officials in Ballymena Borough Council. A detailed schedule of works that will be needed for the reconstruction and repair of the damaged parts of the cottage has been sent to them, along with a list of conservation architects experienced in vernacular buildings.

The proposal to reinstate the cottage has to be taken before Ballymena Borough Council by its Tourism Department, before the Technical Services Department can proceed with the procurement process. Officials have advised that it is hoped to have this matter on the agenda for the Council's November meeting.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of trees in the North Down area that have Tree Preservation Orders placed on them.

(AQW 3541/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Tree Preservation Orders have been served on trees or tree groups at 67 locations throughout North Down. The locations are detailed on the attached list.

1.	Lands at 35 & 39 Glen Road, Cultra, Holywood
2.	Lands at 3, 3a, 5 and 7 Alexandra Park, and 3 Norwood Lane, Holywood
3.	Lands at Brook House, 17 Croft Road, Holywood, Co Down
4.	3 Seahill Road, Holywood
5.	Lands at North West Boundary of 1 - 4 Woodland Manor, Helen's Bay, Co Down
6.	Land North of 32 Downshire Road, Bangor (Thalassa Phase 3)
7.	Lands at Ballymullan Road and 67 Ballyrobert Road, Crawfordsburn
8.	102 & 102a Bangor Road Holywood
9.	Lands at 42 Victoria Road, Holywood
10.	Lands at Bridge Road, Helen's Bay

11.	Lands at 141 Bangor Road, Holywood
12.	Lands 10m south of 45 Glen Road, Cultra
13.	Lands at 16 - 18 Victoria Road, Holywood - PROVISIONAL
14.	Land adj to 10 Whinney Hill, Holywood
15.	Woodbank, Croft Road, Holywood
16.	Adjacent to 11 Whinney Hill, Holywood.
17.	Whinney Hill Development, Holywood
18.	Tree Tops, Whinney Hill, Holywood
19.	Killaire House, Killaire Road, Bangor
20.	Knocknatten, Whinney Hill, Holywood, Co. Down
21.	Dromkeen House, My Lady's Mile, Holywood
22.	Plas Merdyn, Church Road, Holywood
23.	Croft House, Croft Road, Holywood
24.	Lands at Whinney Hill, Holywood
25.	Cultra House, Cultra
26.	Land to the rear 63 Station Road, Craigavad, Holywood
27.	Beechfield Avenue, Conlig, Bangor.
28.	Seacourt, Bangor
29.	To the rear of 43 Station Road, Craigavad
30.	The Rectory, 2 Raglan Road, Bangor
31.	Lands to the south of 5, 21, 23 and 25 Carneyhill Seahill
32.	67 Station Road, Craigavad
33.	Worcester Avenue, Bangor
34.	Lands at St. Columbanus, adjacent to 57 Craigdarragh Road, Helen's Bay.
35.	The Beeches, Gransha Road, Bangor
36.	Lands at 83a Victoria Road and 44 Glenview Road, Holywood
37.	At 14 Seafront Road, Cultra, Holywood.
38.	159 Groomsport Road, Ballyholme, Bangor.
39.	42 Victoria Road, Holywood
40.	Lands at 15 Morningside, Ballyholme, Bangor
41.	Land at St Mark's Church of Ireland Church, Holywood Road, Belfast.
42.	16 Glen Road, Cultra, Holywood, Co Down.
43.	Lands at 1 Kathleen Drive, Helen's Bay, Co Down.
44.	Land from 20-46 Ballymenoch Road + 19-21 Whinney Hill, Holywood
45.	Lands 32 Bridge Road, Helens Bay
46.	Lands at 18 Ailsa Road, Cultra, Holywood
47.	Trees in the grounds of 126 Bangor Road, Holywood
48.	Land to the rear of 49 Ballyrobert Road Crawfordsburn
49.	Lands at 4 Bennet Wood, Helen's Bay, Co Down.
50.	Lands at 73,75 & 77 Victoria Road and to the rear of 22, 24, 26 & 28 Church Avenue, Holywood
51.	Lands at Ardavon, 16 Glen Road, Holywood
52.	Adjoining Fruithill Park, Bangor
53.	2 Circular Road East, Cultra
54.	Lands North East of 165 Groomsport Road, Bangor
55.	Lands at and adjacent to Woodside Cottage, 103 Main Street, Conlig
56.	Lands at Kathleen Avenue, Helen's Bay.
57.	48 Station Road (Cedar Lane), Craigavad, Holywood, Co Down
58.	Land at 8 Killaire Avenue, Ballykillaire, Bangor, Co Down.
59.	lands at Ballykillaire Sports Ground, Old Belfast Road, Bangor
60.	15 Farnham Road, Bangor

61.	3, 5 & 7 Croft Gardens, Holywood
62.	21 Windsor Avenue, Bangor.
63.	Lands at Cultra Avenue, Old Cultra Road, Cultra Lane, Cultra Terrace, Farmhill Road, Farmhill Lane, The Orchard, Orchard Way, Tarawood, Clanbrassil Road, Ailsa Road, Seafront Road and Ben Vista Park, Cultra
64.	21 Bridge Road, Helen's Bay
65.	9 Bridge Road, Helen's Bay
66.	Land between Inn Car Park & Crawfordsburn River, Crawfordsburn
67.	239, 241 & 243 Bangor Road, Seahill - PROVISIONAL

Planning Policy Statements: PPS 18

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether the Supplementary Planning Guidance for PPS 18 is suitable and conducive to the Executive's target of achieving 40 percent renewable energy by 2020.

(AQW 3544/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The purpose and scope of the Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes – Supplementary Planning Guidance to Planning Policy Statement 18 Renewable Energy (SPG) clearly highlight that "This guidance shares the aim of PPS18 to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable energy targets and to realize the benefits of renewable energy".

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, on behalf of the Department, undertook an assessment to determine the compatibility of the Supplementary Planning Guidance with the Draft Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland 2009 Assessment (SEF).

The conclusions of the assessment were:

- The Department considers that appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that the SEF has been adequately taken into account during the production of the SPG and that the broad strategic guidance contained within the SPG is clear, proportionate and necessary.
- The Department considers that the SPG contributes to an appropriate planning policy framework which is in place to support the achievement of the targets within the SEF.

I believe that every reasonable opportunity for renewables should be considered. As a result, a renewables planning group for officials and external people/groups involved in the industry, have been meeting to identify how the planning process can be developed to assist applications. As a consequence of this and for other reasons, I am convening a dedicated meeting on anaerobic digesters in December, reviewing guidance on applications in peatland areas, considering what action may be needed to better facilitate application in certain DPO's etc.

Planning Applications: Wind Turbines

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for the erection of wind turbines have been considered by the Omagh Planning Office in each of the last three years and how many have been approved.

(AQW 3570/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below details the information requested.

	Approved	Refused	Total
2008/09	34	4	38
2009/10	22	8	30
2010/11	38	9	47
Total	94	21	115

Source: Planning NI

Smoke Control Areas

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the process by which local councils can create Smoke Control Zones.

(AQW 3597/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are a number of situations where a District Council may consider it appropriate to declare a Smoke Control Area. For example, as part of a strategy to improve local air quality, where there is evidence of elevated concentrations of emissions from coal burning, or as part of an action plan in an air quality management area. The Department of the Environment has published Policy Guidance on Smoke Control Areas for district councils which sets out the procedure for establishing a Smoke Control Area. The document is available on the DOE website at the link below.

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/local_air_quality_management_policy_guidance_on_smoke_control_areas_pdf_format.pdf

Strangford Lough: Horse Mussel Beds

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how he intends to evaluate the economic impact of any decision to increase the protection of the horse mussel reefs in Strangford Lough.

(AQW 3767/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I do not consider that the measures proposed by the Department of the Environment to facilitate the restoration of horse mussel reefs in Strangford Lough will have a significant economic impact. I am however concerned about the financial implications of not taking appropriate action should the European Commission decide to renew its infraction case.

Zebra Mussels

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to stop any further spread of zebra mussels across the island of Ireland.

(AQW 3775/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department recognises the threat posed by zebra mussels to our native wildlife and officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) have undertaken a number of actions in an effort to stop their further spread. The Department does not have any jurisdiction in the Republic of Ireland but recognises the need for co-ordinated action across the island of Ireland. NIEA therefore liaises closely with the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Republic to develop joint actions that aim to control the spread of this Invasive Alien Species.

Following their initial discovery in the Shannon - Erne system in 1997, officials in NIEA established a Zebra Mussel Control Group through which they have worked in partnership with a range of other Departments and organisations to co-ordinate actions to stop the further spread of zebra mussels, where it is possible to do so. This group also keeps up to date with research undertaken in other countries, where Zebra mussels are considered to be an invasive species, to ensure that Northern Ireland is kept up to date with current best practice knowledge in relation to monitoring, prevention of spread and potential control options for zebra mussels.

Actions undertaken by NIEA have included the production and placement of zebra mussel warning signage at slipways at affected and high risk sites, the production of Codes of Good Practice for recreational water users and marina managers; and the wide circulation of a dedicated advice leaflet on best practice measures to help prevent the spread of zebra mussels.

In addition, the recent introduction of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011 added zebra mussels to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 which now makes it an offence for any person to release zebra mussels into the wild.

While the prevention of further spread of zebra mussels is a shared responsibility of all recreational water users, there are natural vectors of spread. Recent surveys suggest that the flood events in the Erne system during 2009 may have resulted in a number of small outlying lakes being colonised.

Flooding: Financial Assistance

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of his statement on 24 October 2011, regarding the financial assistance available for householders affected by floods, to detail (i) when it will be made available; (ii) how much will be available; and (iii) how people can apply for this assistance.

(AQW 3888/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In my written statement to the Assembly on 26 October 2011, I advised Members of my intention to activate a Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance and the Scheme is now in operation for District Councils to administer. Householders who wish to apply for financial assistance should notify their local council within 21 days of their property being flooded and payments of £1k to eligible householders will be issued by councils as quickly as possible afterwards. This expenditure will be reimbursed by the Department.

Radioactive Substances

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the facilities that currently exist which would be capable of processing and disposing of naturally occurring radioactive substances brought to the surface as a result of drilling for oil and gas.

(AQW 3913/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The processing and disposal routes for wastes containing naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM) resulting from oil and gas production vary according to the concentration of radioactivity they contain. The Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 defines what is radioactive for the purpose of regulation. NORM waste may be "out of scope", "exempt" or "non exempt". Out of scope or exempt NORM waste can be disposed of to a landfill in Northern Ireland in the same manner as non radioactive waste.

NORM that is not exempt can only be disposed of to a facility that has an authorisation issued under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. I have been advised that there are no such facilities in Northern Ireland.

The only current facility for handling non exempt NORM in the UK is based at Drigg, Cumbria.

DOE: Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment to list all the current public contracts within his Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due to go out to tender. **(AQW 4253/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The Department does not retain a central register of contracts less than £30k. Due to the high volume of low value contracts, and the significant number of related invoices which would have to be reviewed (approx 34,000 per annum) to ensure accurate identification of all current low value contracts, this information is not available without incurring disproportionate costs.

The Department is currently in discussions with CPD with a view to progressing all contracts over a lower threshold of £20k. In addition to creating potential opportunities for more small and medium sized suppliers, the application of the lower threshold will improve centrally held information on all contracts above £20k.

The Department follows CPD guidance in relation to securing quotations/selected tenders for contracts below £30k which do not require public advertisement.

However, the Department retains a central database of all public contracts over £30k in value which are awarded through the Department of Finance and Personnel, Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). I have detailed at Annex A all current public contracts over £30k, the end date of the contract and to whom each contract was awarded.

In relation to re-tendering, the end date of each contract period has been provided and subject to assessment of operational need for future work and availability of future funding, the re-tendering process, if needed, usually commences around six months before the expiry of the current contract. Re-tendering has commenced for the following two existing contracts which are due for tender early next year:

- (i) site maintenance contract, Regional Operations, Natural Heritage, Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); and
- (ii) cash transit, Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA).

All public contracts which are awarded through CPD are advertised via:-

- e Resourcing NI on the CPD web site;
- advertisements in 3 local newspapers – Belfast Telegraph, Belfast Newsletter and Irish News and includes a link 'new to view' to the CPD site;
- in specialist journals/periodicals (when requested); and
- in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) where the EU threshold is exceeded.

Contract Description	Contractor Name	Contract end date
Air Quality Archive & Website for NI 2009-2012	AEA Technology	March 2012
Campaign advertising – re-think waste	AV Browne Group	Nov 2012
Independent expert review of retail application and Public Enquiry	Colliers International	End of enquiry
Belfast Tall Building guidance	Urban Initiatives	March 2012
Provision of cash services	Securicor	3 months notice
Provision of Technical Accountancy Support Service	CIPFA	March 2012
Road Safety - Appointment of an Advertising Agency	Lyle Bailie International Ltd	July 2012
Teaching Aid Calendar	Rusk Design	Nov 2011
Annual Schools Requisition	ROSPA	Dec 2011
IT/IS Provision (01/06/09 - 31/05/14)	BT Ireland Ltd	May 2014
Events Management 2008-2011 Living History Events	Irish Arms	April 2012
Cleaning/Catering, Omagh	Mountcharles	March 2012
Provision of Driving Theory Testing Services	Pearson Driving Assessment Ltd	June 2014
Personal Protection Equipment	ARCO/JBS Boylan	June 2013
FM Contract (NIDLS/DATACARD)	FUJITSU LTD	August 2013
Taxi Licensing Information System	BT	Oct 2013
MOT 2	Romaha Ltd	2018
Booking Service	Northgate Management Services Ltd	March 2012
Sale of vehicle reg marks	Wilson Auctions	Dec 2012
Supply of consumables for taxi plates	VIP Systems Ltd	Feb 2013
SUN Accounting System	SUN Sisco	Nov 2011
DVA Cash in Transit	GS4	To be agreed

Contract Description	Contractor Name	Contract end date
Maintenance Calibration & Verification of the DVA Weigh Bridge Network in Northern Ireland	Control Ltd	March 2013
Waste disposal	Greenstar NI Ltd	March 2012
Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 2007	University of Ulster	March 2012
GIS Data Support	Compass Informatics	March 2012
Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds in GB & Ireland	Bird Watch Ireland	Dec 2011
Field Research & Analysis in Respect of UK Marine SPA Programme	JNCC	Aug 2013
Natural Heritage Research Partnership	Queen's University	June 2018
Survey and monitoring of semi-natural habitats in NI	ADAS UK Ltd	Dec 2011
Developing Standard Site Specific Monitoring Methodologies for ESCR Sites	AECOM	March 2012
Cedar Initiative - Survey, Monitoring and Advisory Services for Species features on Designated Sites 2009/13	National Museums & Galleries of N.I.	March 2013
Cedar Initiative - NIMF 2011/2014	National Museums & Galleries of N.I.	May 2014
Site Maintenance	WB Contracts	March 2012
Site Maintenance	JF McGovern	March 2012
Site Maintenance	SM Cuffey Landscapes	March 2012
Site Maintenance	The Landscape Centre	March 2012
Cedar Initiative - Orchid Ireland	National Museums & Galleries NI	Sept 2012
Saving our magnificent meadows	Plant Life International	Dec 2011
Invasive Species in Ireland	Enviro Centrte Ltd	Dec 2012
Second Survey of Historic Buildings	Paul Logan	March 2012
Second Survey of Lisburn, Banbridge, North Down, Belfast, Castlereagh & Coleraine Council Areas	Alastair Coey Architects	March 2013
IT Facilitator	Transformation Services Ltd	Nov 2011
Northern Ireland Archaeology Forum - Staff & Work Programme	Northern Ireland Archaeology Link	Nov 2011
Provision of archaeological Fieldwork Service	QUB	Nov 2012
Publication of Excavations	Nick Brannon	Nov 2011
Provision of a managed publishing service	The Stationery Office	Jan 2012
Provision of Maritime and Freshwater Archaeological Services 2009 - 2012	University of Ulster	March 2012
Editorial Assistance Contract	Dr BG Scott	Aug 2013
Private Water Supplies Sample collection & Analysis	White Young Green	Jan 2012
Technical Review & Determination of PPC & PAD Applications	Entec Uk Ltd	Sept 2012
Radiochemical analysis of public drinking water sources NI	Health Protection Agency	March 2012
Preparation of a UK Recovery Handbook for Chemical Incidents	Dept for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	March 2012
Quality waste protocols programme	Environment Agency	Aug 2012
Analytical Sub Contract Framework - Shellfish Flesh	AFBI	Nov 2011
Analytical sub contracting Framework - Macroinvertebrates	APEM Ltd	Nov 2011
Analytical sub contracting Framework - Phytoplankton Identification	Ensis Ltd	Nov 2011
Analytical sub contracting Framework - Diatoms, Macrophytes Lakes, Macrophytes Rivers	Jacobs Ltd	Nov 2011
Analytical sub contracting Framework - Trace Analysis	National Laboratory Services / Environment Agency	Nov 2011
Analytical Sub Contract Framework - Identification of Lake Profundal	Sweeny Consultancy	Nov 2011

Contract Description	Contractor Name	Contract end date
Analytical sub contracting Framework - Benthic Taxonomy & Invertebrate	Unicomarine Ltd	Nov 2011
Research Assistants	QUB	March 2012
Aquacheck 2009 - 2012	Aquacheck Ltd	March 2012
Lease of Lester House Springfarm Industrial Estate Antrim	Oregon Properties Ltd	July 2018
Protective Clothing	ARCO/Antrim Supplies/ JSB/O'Sullivan Safety	June 2012
Purchase and supply of mopeds for schools	Piaggio & C spa	March 2014
Legal services for SWaMP2008 infrastructure project	Author Cox Sols	March 2012
PR service for SWaMP infrastructure project	ASG	March 2012
Provision of arboriculture services	Clarke Cunningham Tree Maintenance Ltd	Aug 2012
NICCIIP	SNIFFER	March 2012
Recommendation of determination of PPC Permit and PAD applications	AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure UK	June 2012
Designated Keepers of Dangerous Wild Animals and Endangered Species	Specialist Wildlife Services	July 2013
GCMS Triple Quadrupole System	Agilent Technologies	Feb 2012
Ariel monitoring	PDG Helicopters	Sept 2013
Provision of archaeological office related services	Pro-Arc Ltd	Nov 2013

Fish Kills

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in reducing the number and scale of fish kills in rivers in the last two years.

(AQW 4481/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of water pollution, for regulating discharges to waterways and underground strata and for initiating enforcement action where appropriate, as defined under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, including incidents where a fishkill is confirmed.

The Agency operates on a 24-hour, 365 days-a-year basis, to co-ordinate the Agency's response to incidents of water pollution and fishkills. Water pollution incident reporting is encouraged by NIEA and the use of the Water Pollution Hotline 0800 807060 is promoted widely.

NIEA has set targets for responding to pollution incidents based on their severity. When a report of pollution is received, the Agency aims to assess and estimate the incident severity and issue a report to an investigation officer within 30 minutes so that a response can be carried out as quickly as possible, in order to minimise any potential impact that may be caused.

NIEA Water Management Unit (WMU) protects the aquatic environment through a variety of proactive prevention activities including monitoring water quality, implementing River Basin Management Plans, regulating effluent discharges, supporting research and taking action to combat or minimise the effects of pollution.

Proactive inspection visits are carried out at a significant number of industrial, water utility and agricultural premises each year to provide advice on the necessary measures to prevent a pollution incident from occurring.

Under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), there are extensive monitoring requirements. NIEA carries out regular sampling at over 500 river sites, 21 lake sites, over 80 groundwater sites and some 40 marine sites in Northern Ireland. This helps to identify areas at risk from pollution and allows the Agency to direct proactive pollution prevention and regulatory control work to these areas.

NIEA also carries out a significant number of regulatory activities under various pieces of legislation. Regulation is aimed at controlling discharges to ensure that they can be sustained by the receiving waterway without damage to the aquatic environment and without breaching national or EU Directive standards.

These activities reduce the risk of water pollution incidents from occurring and consequently the risk of fishkills.

Unfortunately, there remains the potential for accidents to occur and there will always be instances where individuals will act outside of the law for their own financial benefit or convenience.

Where pollution occurs, it is NIEA policy to take formal enforcement action if this is warranted by the severity of the pollution and the circumstances which led to it occurring. In an incident of water pollution, where there has been a significant fishkill and where the polluter is known, NIEA will normally seek to take enforcement action.

Through this enforcement action, NIEA has secured 38 criminal convictions in 2009 and 41 criminal convictions in 2010. There is a significant risk for any polluter that they may be identified by NIEA and be subject to enforcement action including prosecution. This risk is a serious and on-going deterrent to potential polluters.

Table 1 below sets out the number of fishkills in each of the last 2 years. Although this shows an increase in 2010 compared with 2009 it is not possible to draw conclusions on the basis of only two years data. The combined aim of the reactive, proactive, preventative and regulatory work undertaken by NIEA is to see a reduction in both the number and the scale of fishkills in rivers in the future.

Table 1: Total Number of fishkills in Northern Ireland in the last 2 years

Category	2009	2010
Slight (less than 10 fish killed)	7	11
Moderate (10 – 100 fish killed)	8	7
Major (more than 100 fish killed)	2	4
Total	17	22

Sewage: Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment on how many occasions enforcement processes have been carried out at the human waste sludge site on the A37 Broad Road, Limavady, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 5018/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA, has granted a mobile plant licence to a company to permit the storage and treatment of sewage sludge in an old quarry alongside the A37 Limavady to Coleraine Road.

The licence includes a range of conditions to ensure the sludge is managed properly and fully complies with waste legislation. The licence also includes a Site Specific Working Plan

The Waste Licensing Section, NIEA routinely inspects and monitors the site to ensure compliance with the waste licence and the Site Specific Working Plan.

The Section has undertaken enforcement action twice during 2010 and 2011. These actions were:

- On the 19 January 2011 the Agency issued the company with a formal warning regarding the operation of the facility. Complaints had been received and were substantiated in relation to bad odour on the stretch of road which passes the site, lorries parking on the hard shoulder and the odour from these, as well as the dirty nature of the road was not satisfactory. The company was required to remedy all of these breaches and to comply with the licence conditions and site specific working plan.
- On 8 April 2011 NIEA issued the company with a statutory Notice under Article 16(4) of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The company was required to remedy breaches of the Site Specific Working Plan, relating to odour, mud on the road and the quantity of material treated at the site. These breaches had been substantiated by the Waste Licensing Section in NIEA as a result of a site inspection.

Double Glazing: Listed Buildings

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the criteria used by his Department to permit the installation of double glazing in listed buildings.

(AQW 5021/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The policy in relation to the repair and/or replacement of windows in listed buildings is covered in Annex E: Guidelines for the Alteration, Extension and Maintenance of Listed Buildings, of Planning Policy Statement (PPS)6 - Planning Archaeology and the Built Heritage - paragraphs E12-E18. I have attached a copy of these paragraphs for ease of reference. PPS6 may be viewed online at - http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/policy_publications/planning_statements/pps06.htm

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6 - Planning Archaeology and the Built Heritage – paragraphs E12-E18.

Windows

E12 As a rule, windows in historic buildings should be repaired, or if beyond repair should be replaced “like for like”. In considering listed building consent applications for additional windows it is important that their design, scale and proportion should be sympathetic to the character of the building. The fact that owners so often wish to alter windows demonstrates that windows attract the attention of practically anyone who objectively looks at a building. They are the eyes of the building and they catch the eye. The finish, the material from which they are made, the method of opening, the subdivisions of the glass, the characteristics of the glass, the interplay of panes, the profiles of each component, the relation of sills, architraves, encasements, shutters etc. all play their part in the overall character of the window. The window plays a vital role in the overall appearance and character of the building internally as well as externally.

E13 Old windows were generally made of sturdy materials, they may look shabby and rundown and they may fit badly and admit drafts but nevertheless it is possible, more often than not, to repair and restore the original units. Repair rather than replacement

should be the first aim in any scheme for a listed building. Original timber sliding box sash windows and casement windows can be fitted with seals, gaskets and improved ironmongery to provide a performance that will match any modern window type.

E14 Within the broad window types such as sash or casement there is a wide variation of detail according to date, function and region. Standardisation to one pattern should be avoided. The thickness and moulding of glazing bars, the size and arrangement of panes and other details should be appropriate to the date of the building or to the date when the aperture was made.

Replacement Windows

E15 The insertion of factory made standard windows of all kinds, whether in timber, aluminium, galvanised steel or plastic is almost always damaging to the character and appearance of historic buildings. In particular, for reasons of strength the thickness of frame members tends to be greater in plastic or aluminium windows than in traditional timber ones. Modern casements with top-opening or louvred lights or asymmetrically spaced lights are generally unsuitable as replacements for windows in historic buildings. Such alterations will not therefore be permitted be allowed. Architects' drawings and specifications should make clear the manner in which new windows are intended to open.

E16 It is usually impossible to install double-glazed units in existing frames without altering the character or appearance of a listed building. Listed building consent is quite likely to be refused for such an alteration because the form and detailing of windows is so often a key architectural element of historic buildings. The more complicated the glazing pattern the more difficult it will be to double glaze and for the installation to meet acceptable conservation standards. Conversely, where there is a simple undivided single sheet of glass in each frame double glazing can usually be fitted without any appreciable change to the appearance and character of the window.

E17 Where there are difficulties, the first step is to discover, by calculation, whether or not double glazing would provide a material benefit in controlling heat loss. Traditional internal timber shutters and good quality curtains will give an equal performance during the hours of darkness. However, heat may be lost through other routes. Commonly this is via the air gaps around badly fitting frames. The installation of draft strips and weather seals is a simple and very effective procedure. Reglazing with thicker single sheet glass or the installation of secondary glazing are other options that will not normally require listed building consent. Plastic strips simulating glazing bars and sandwiched into the cavity of the double glazed unit are not an acceptable conservation option.

E18 In certain circumstances trickle ventilation will be a statutory requirement. There are a variety of ways to modify the designs of traditional windows to make this provision and there are ventilators available that have been specially designed to meet conservation criteria. Where difficulties arise it is as well to remember that the purpose of the ventilator is simply to ventilate the room; it is not a requirement that it be provided through the window. Other locations should therefore be assessed in difficult circumstances.

Gas Wells

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to provide details of whether the installation of gas wells would require planning permission.

(AQW 5038/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have been advised by officials that any proposal for a gas well is considered to be development requiring the granting of planning permission. DOE Planning & Local Government Group is not currently processing any planning applications for gas well installations in Northern Ireland.

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment when secondary legislation will be brought forward to ensure the implementation of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 by the target date of April 2012.

(AQW 5043/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Six sets of subordinate regulations are required under the Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010. Work on the regulations is well advanced with four sets already drafted and public consultations on the last two sets of regulations recently issued. The Department plans to bring forward the six sets of regulations to the Assembly Environment Committee in March 2012, with the Goods Vehicle Act commencing operationally in April 2012.

Planning: Supermarket in Castlereagh

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether any planning application for a new supermarket in the Castlereagh area of Belfast has been submitted or approved, or whether any interest has been expressed, in the last two years; and, if so to provide details.

(AQW 5046/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department currently has four planning applications under consideration for supermarkets and associated development in the Castlereagh Council Area.

The first application was received on 24 October 2007 for the construction of retail units and apartments at Carryduff Shopping Centre. The application is being considered under Article 31 procedures.

The second application by Tesco Stores Ltd is for a supermarket adjacent to 694 Saintfield Road, Carryduff and was received on 1 May 2009. The application was presented to Castlereagh Borough Council on 27 October 2011 with a recommendation to approve. The decision will be issued shortly.

The third application was received on 25 September 2009 under Article 28 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 to vary Condition 4 in Planning Approval Y/1986/0061 to allow for the sale of convenience goods in an existing retail unit at Homebase, Upper Galwally, Belfast. The proposal is still currently under consideration.

The fourth application by Sainsbury's Supermarket Ltd is for a retail store, petrol station and industrial units at the former Rolls Royce factory, Upper Newtownards Road Dundonald was received on 5 March 2010. This application is being considered under Article 31 procedures.

Planning: Wind Turbines

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for wind turbines in the (i) Ballymoney Borough Council; (ii) Ballymena Borough Council; and (iii) Moyle District Council areas have been (i) approved; and (ii) refused in the last three years.

(AQW 5075/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below shows the number of planning applications in the Ballymoney Borough, Ballymena Borough and Moyle District Council areas that have been approved and refused in each of the last three years.

	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11	
	Approved	Refused	Approved	Refused	Approved	Refused
Ballymena	9	0	4	1	3	0
Ballymoney	8	1	8	0	13	0
Moyle	3	3	2	0	2	0

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Surplus Posts

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of surplus posts in the Civil Service at grades (a) Professional and Technical Officer; (b) Higher Professional and Technical Officer; and (c) Senior Professional and Technical Officer.

(AQW 3495/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is set out in the attached table.

Number and Location of surplus posts at grades (a) Professional and Technical Officer; (b) Higher Professional and Technical Officer; and (c) Senior Professional and Technical Officer in the NICS at 19 October 2011.

	Professional & Technical Officer (PTO)	Location	Higher Professional & Technical Officer (HPTO)	Location
DHSSPS	2	Stormont	1	Stormont
*DOE	45	*Various	52	*Various
Total	47		53	

* It is not possible to identify precisely the individual location of surplus staff as staff may be transferred at any time in response to workloads and business need.

Only those Departments with surplus PTOs and HPTOs are listed.

There were no surplus SPTOs.

Industrial Rating Liability

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether a decision has been made on extending the current cap of 30 percent in industrial rating liability beyond the end of the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 4408/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As part of the Budget 2011-15 process the Executive agreed to hold industrial derating at its current level of 70% for the full Budget period. A copy of the final agreed budget can be accessed at

http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/revised_budget_-_website_version.pdf

Irish Presidential Election: Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 3640/11-15, whether the campaigning of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a candidate in the Irish Presidential election (i) was consistent with these regulations; and (ii) if not, what action he has taken, or intends to take, to recoup any of the money spent by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development during her official visit to the Irish Ploughing Championships.

(AQW 4633/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In all matters pertaining to the Ministerial Code, including the rules relating to the use of public funds, all Ministers are bound by this code and they are each individually responsible for ensuring that they adhere to it at all times. Any complaints regarding the conduct of a Minister, or indeed any Assembly Member, should be progressed in line with the Complaints Procedure section of the NI Assembly "Code of Conduct together with The Guide to The rules Relating to the Conduct Of Members".

Vacancies: Staff Officer

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any Department has vacancies at Staff Officer level in the Derry area.

(AQW 4656/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department for Social Development has two vacancies at Staff Officer level in the Londonderry area.

Payslips

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been spent on providing civil and public servants with paper copies of their payslips in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4668/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP manage the payroll service for the Northern Ireland Civil Service and a number of other public sector bodies. The service is provided by a private sector contractor and includes provision of hard copy payslips to approximately 27,000 staff. Individual elements of the service are not costed separately. As such it is not possible to specify the cost of providing paper copies of payslips.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the level of Gross Domestic Product per capita which would be necessary to eliminate poverty.

(AQW 4713/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Annual estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) are produced by the Office for National Statistics for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. GVA is an estimate of the value of output of goods and services produced by a country or region in a given time period. GVA is not a measure of income or living standards and gives no indication of the distribution of wealth across a society. It does not necessarily follow that an increase in GVA would produce any change in the relative distribution of income and wealth in a country.

DFP: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4823/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Details of the appointments for the years 2007-2010 are already in the public domain and can be accessed via the following link <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/making-government-work/public-appointments.htm>

Details for 2010/2011 will be published by OFMDFM in due course.

Programme for Government

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made on the evaluation of the Programme for Government against the 2011-15 budget.

(AQW 4850/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Budget 2011-15 was developed in the context of a constrained Spending Review settlement for Northern Ireland where the Executive faced a real terms decline in public spending.

In the absence of a new Programme for Government the Budget 2011-15 was predicated on the priorities set out in the Programme for Government 2008-11 and the views of that Executive in terms of emerging priorities. The over-arching aim, of peace, prosperity, fairness and wellbeing, in the draft Programme for Government 2011-15 remains the same as in the previous document. The economy remains the main priority in both documents.

The commitments set out in the draft Programme for Government 2011-5 are undoubtedly aspirational but the Executive believes that they are achievable even within the constrained budgets set for the 2011-15 period.

As time progresses over the coming months and years, the Executive will reallocate resources through monitoring rounds to ensure that the objectives as presented within the Programme for Government are delivered as effectively as possible.

Affordable Housing

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Westminster in relation to the financial investment package for affordable housing announced on 21 November 2011; and whether the provisions of such a package will be extended to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 4852/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Chancellor's Autumn Statement clarified that there will be Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland associated with the new 'Get Britain Building' and 'Empty Homes' elements of the housing package. This amounts to £8.7 million in 2012-13, £5.9 million in 2013-14 and -£0.5 million in 2014-15.

The majority of this funding has been earmarked for use only when providing equity and loans to developers and the Executive will consider how to deploy this funding in due course. HM Treasury has indicated that the equity and loan finance funding will need to be repaid to the Exchequer by 2019-20.

Global Economic Crisis

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the progress made on any of the agreed actions emanating from the emergency meeting he held at the beginning of August 2011 to discuss the current global economic crisis.

(AQW 4913/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At the meeting we discussed concerns regarding the impact of the European sovereign debt crisis and weakening global economy on Northern Ireland and any actions that could be taken locally to mitigate the adverse impacts of these events.

In particular, business leaders highlighted the damaging impact the crisis was having on business and consumer confidence in Northern Ireland and stressed how important it was for the Executive to emphasize what it is doing to help restore this. In this regard, we have recently published our draft Programme for Government and Economic Strategy setting out our approach and the steps we are taking to support business and re-build the economy in the near term.

The impact of the crisis was having on our local banking sector and the availability of finance for local businesses was also identified as a major concern. Since this meeting, I have been working with both governments and the local banks to try to ensure that finance is available to businesses. In particular I have pressed the banks to ensure that the British Bankers' Association Business Finance Taskforce recommendations are implemented locally. Progress in this regard was announced at a regional Better Business Finance event in Belfast on 17 November, including establishing an independent appeal process; the creation of a mentoring network; and the finance that is being made available through the Business Growth Fund.

I also agreed that I would seek a meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the particular issues faced by the Northern Ireland banking sector which took place on 16 November 2011. At that meeting I asked, and Sir Mervyn agreed to consider what mechanisms might be put in place to ensure that Northern Ireland can benefit from the initiatives taken nationally to improve liquidity in the banking system.

Economic Inactivity: Portavogie

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of economically inactive people in Portavogie in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4948/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide estimates of the number of economically inactive in Portavogie in each of the last 5 years. However, results from the recent population Census will include estimates of the economically inactive in March 2011, in small areas such as Portavogie. These will become available from autumn 2012.

The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey provides estimates of the economically inactive population at District Council Area (DCA) level. For information, economic inactivity estimates for Ards DCA, relative to the Northern Ireland average for each of the last five years, are included in the table below.

Working age Economic Inactivity¹ estimates, Ards DCA & NI, 2006 - 2010

Year	Number economically inactive in Ards DCA	Economic inactivity rate in Ards DCA	Economic inactivity rate in NI
2006	14,000	28.4%	29.6%
2007	14,000	27.1%	28.6%
2008	15,000	28.5%	29.3%
2009	14,000	27.1%	30.1%
2010	13,000	27.6%	29.1%

- 1 The working age estimates are based on the population aged 16 to 64. These figures are sourced to a sample survey and are therefore subject to sampling error.

Source: Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey Annual (Jan-Dec) Dataset

Petroleum Extraction Licence: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for her assessment of the impact the award of a petroleum extraction licence in County Fermanagh will have on the land values in the area.

(AQW 4963/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Investigations indicate that there is no market evidence that would indicate that the granting of the petroleum extraction licence has affected the current market value of agricultural land in County Fermanagh.

In itself, the award of a petroleum licence in an area should not have a significant effect on land value because exploration activities are typically short-term and small-scale. Exploration companies may pay modest sums to landowners for temporary access to land to carry out seismic surveys or more substantial amounts for the rental of sites used for drilling, but these are unlikely to affect land prices substantially.

DFP: Peace Funding

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the groups in the greater East Belfast area that have received peace funding from his Department in each of the last three years; and (ii) who provides the 35 percent match funding for each group.

(AQW 4982/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP is not directly responsible for any PEACE III funding aside from the small Technical Assistance budget that covers Programme administration. DFP is, however, the sponsor department for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), which is the PEACE III Managing Authority.

The table below details PEACE III funding awarded to groups in East Belfast (Belfast East parliamentary constituency) in the last three years.

OFMdFM is the Northern Ireland accountable department for funding awarded under PEACE III, Theme 1.1; DSD is the Northern Ireland accountable department for funding under PEACE III, Theme 2.1.

Year Awarded	Project	Organisation Name	Total Award (£)	Theme
2008/09	Short Strand Community Forum	Short Strand Community Forum ¹	96,394	1.1 Regional
	From Prison to Peace: Building on Experience	Charter Regional CTI2	351,813.34	1.1 Regional
	From Prison to Peace: Building on Experience	East Belfast Charter ²	307,531.12	1.1 Regional
	The Skainos Project	Skainos Ltd	6,125,831	2.1 Shared Spaces
2009/10	Community Capacity Building - Managing a Peace III programme	Copius Consulting ³	25,900	1.1 Local
	Scoping Exercise - Engagement Integration and Diversity Programme	Juniper Consulting ³	6,975	1.1 Local
	Changing attitudes	Ballymacarrett Arts & Cultural Society ⁴	25,000	1.1 Local
	East Belfast Mission & Short Strand Community Forum Peace III project	East Belfast Mission ⁴	24,864.30	1.1 Local
	The Glentoran Respect Initiative	Glentoran Partnership ⁴	23,050	1.1 Local
	Rising Stars Initiative - Bridging Divides, Developing Leaders and Changing Perceptions	PeacePlayers International Northern Ireland ⁴	24,998.06	1.1 Local
	St Matthews & Avoniel Parent Support Programme	St Matthews Primary ⁴ School	23,700	1.1 Local
	Restoration of the SS Nomadic	Department for Social Development	2,324,780	2.1 Shared Spaces

Year Awarded	Project	Organisation Name	Total Award (£)	Theme
2010/11	Project X-Adventure	Ocean Youth Trust Ireland ⁵	29,500	1.1 Local
	Developing Youth Role Models	Copius Consulting ⁶	97,773	1.1 Local
	Dreamscheme - Future Together	Dreamscheme NI - Newtownbreda Baptist Church ⁶	49,260	1.1 Local
	What Unites Us	The Bytes Project ⁶	39,170	1.1 Local
	Kick it out!!!	Tullycarnet Community Football Club ⁶	21,050	1.1 Local
	Area Development Programme - Cultural Awareness and Relationship Building	Copius Consulting ³	90,000	1.1 Local
	Total		9,687,589.82	
2011/12	Belfast Local Action Plan - Phase II*	N.A.	4,491,417	1.1 Local

- 1 This project is a sub-project of the Training for Women Network Positive Relations Project
- 2 These projects are sub-projects of the From Prison to Peace: Building on Experience project led by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI)
- 3 These projects are sub-projects of the Carrickfergus, Antrim and Newtownabbey Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan
- 4 These projects are sub-projects of the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan
- 5 These projects are sub-projects of the Southern Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan
- 6 These projects are sub-projects of the Lisburn/Castlereagh Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

* This project has recently received a Letter of Offer. Calls for funding will be opened by Belfast City Council and it is possible funding will be allocated to some projects in East Belfast.

Funding to PEACE III projects comprises 67.54% from the European Regional Development Fund and 32.46% match funding provided by the two member states—Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Match funding is provided by the relevant accountable departments in the two jurisdictions.

Civil Service: Sick Absence

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to reduce the level of staff sick absence across the Civil Service, (i) what is the target; (ii) what percentage of improvement is required to attain the target; and (iii) what measures will be taken to achieve the target.

(AQW 4998/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The target is to reduce the overall level of sickness absence in the Civil Service to 8.5 days per staff year by 2015.

A 23% improvement is required based on the 2009/10 figure of 11 days per staff year.

The NICS has a comprehensive approach to managing sickness absence. Measures taken to achieve the targets include monitoring and reporting, early intervention (Occupational Health Service referral and Welfare intervention) and case management. The introduction of a revised inefficiency sickness absence policy focuses on areas such as return to work interviews, warning action and a new process for managing long term sickness absence.

NICS is also developing a new training programme for line managers aimed at ensuring they are equipped to manage sickness absence effectively.

National Asset Management Agency

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the most recent contact he has had with his counterpart in the Dublin Government about the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and its portfolio in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 5015/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have discussed the work of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and the impact it is having in Northern Ireland many times with the current Irish Finance Minister, and his predecessor, the late Brian Lenihan. I most recently met with Michael Noonan TD and Brendan Howlin TD (Irish Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform) in the margins of the 18 November 2011 North South Ministerial Council Plenary where we discussed a number of banking and finance issues, including NAMA.

The issues discussed included the nature of the Northern Ireland assets held by NAMA and how these would be managed. The composition of the NAMA Board and how the representation of Northern Ireland interests might be strengthened was also discussed, as were the arrangements that have been established for local public representatives to contact the Authority.

The ongoing work of NAMA is going to have a significant impact on the Northern Ireland economy over the next few years and we agreed that we would need to carefully monitor and maintain contact on this situation.

National Asset Management Agency

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the influence of the National Asset Management Agency's property portfolio on the Northern Ireland property market.

(AQW 5016/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Firstly, I believe establishing NAMA was a necessary step to restore liquidity and confidence in the Irish financial system, including those Irish owned banks that operate in Northern Ireland. That said, £3.35bn of NAMA's total loan portfolio is based in Northern Ireland and clearly the approach that NAMA takes in disposing of the assets associated with these loans could have a significant impact on our property market.

On that basis, I have sought and received repeated assurances from the Irish Government and NAMA that there would be no firesale of Northern Ireland assets. We have been told that while NAMA has taken control of loans and assets from some major local property / development companies, these will be carefully managed. Nevertheless, we must realise that the release of NAMA properties to the market could exacerbate the imbalance in supply and demand that currently exists in the Northern Ireland property market and could depress prices. Clearly this is a major concern.

On the upside, if heavily discounted prices are accepted by NAMA this could provide a small stimulus to the housing market in a few niche areas. Furthermore, I also anticipate that specialist funds and institutional investors will become increasingly important in a context of constrained bank funding and if NAMA disposals are targeted at these potential purchasers, it may also stimulate more interest in Northern Ireland as a region for such investment.

Clearly the work of NAMA is going to have a significant impact in Northern Ireland for some years to come and I can assure you that I will monitor this situation very closely and will continue to liaise with the Authority and the Irish Government to ensure that Northern Ireland interests are protected as much as is possible.

Public Procurement Contracts: Social Clauses

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the commitment in the draft Programme for Government, to outline the nature of the social clauses which will be included in all public procurement contracts.

(AQW 5052/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Many large scale construction contracts, awarded by CPD and Centres of Procurement Expertise, include social clauses requiring the provision of work opportunities for the unemployed, apprentices, placements for students on construction related courses and training opportunities for the unemployed. Supplies and Services contracts provide less scope for social clauses related to employment and training as typically these contracts have a lower value and a limited labour content.

Most public procurement contracts currently include standard social clauses requiring compliance with applicable fair employment, equality of treatment, anti-discrimination and health & safety legislation as well as fair payment requirements.

More work will now be undertaken as part of the Procurement Board's Strategic Plan to ensure that social clauses are included where the scope exists to do so. This work will include the development of additional guidance to assist Departments and procurement practitioners across the public sector to meet this commitment.

Civil Servants: Economists

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Civil Servants are currently employed as economists.

(AQW 5083/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are two categories of Economists employed in the Northern Ireland Civil Service; general Economists and Agricultural Economists. The table below sets out the position in each of the categories in accordance with the most recently published data at 1 January 2011.

TOTAL NUMBER OF NICS STAFF EMPLOYED AS ECONOMISTS AT 1 January 2011

Grade	Staff Headcount
Agricultural Economists	12
Economists	72
Total	84

Notes

Data sourced from HRConnect at 1st Jan 2011.

Staff on career break have been excluded.

Corporation Tax

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if the unqualified commitment in the draft Programme for Government to press for the devolution of Corporation Tax powers mean he has changed his stance of December 2010 when he said that the devolution of the powers would be 'totally unattractive' if it resulted in a substantial cut to the block grant.

(AQW 5115/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No, my position has not changed on this. The commitment in the draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy, which was published for public consultation alongside the draft Programme for Government, is clear that we will work to successfully conclude on the negotiations with the UK Government to secure the power to vary the rate of corporation tax "in a timely and affordable manner".

Prescribed Recreations

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps a sport, which is not currently on the list of prescribed recreations, has to undertake, and what conditions would it have to meet to enable it to satisfy the criteria for 80 percent rate relief on any premises from which it operated.

(AQW 5153/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A sport must appear on the list of prescribed recreations in order to avail of 80 percent rate relief on any premises from which it operates. No relief can be applied if a sport is not listed. The list was last updated in 2007. The legislation prescribing applicable sports is only made following consultation with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland.

Relief is restricted to those activities that require an appreciable degree of physical effort. Games that require a high degree of skill or contribute to intellectual development but require little physical effort do not generally qualify as prescribed recreations, although the degree of physical effort in the list of prescribed recreations varies considerably.

Unemployment: Coleraine and Limavady

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people who were registered as unemployed in each quarter of the last three years in (i) Coleraine; and (ii) Limavady, broken down by age.

(AQW 5196/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested can be found in the tables below.

Table 1 – Unemployment benefit claimants by age in Coleraine DCA, October 2008 - 2011

Period	Age bands					All Claimants
	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 or over	
October 2008	345	230	215	140	70	1,005
January 2009	495	315	295	210	100	1,410
April 2009	500	365	320	230	105	1,525
July 2009	535	365	335	250	115	1,600
October 2009	530	420	370	260	100	1,680
January 2010	555	465	400	295	110	1,820
April 2010	540	440	385	300	110	1,780
July 2010	535	410	375	300	110	1,725
October 2010	550	405	365	290	115	1,725
January 2011	565	440	410	300	125	1,840
April 2011	520	460	405	285	125	1,790
July 2011	515	430	395	280	125	1,745
October 2011	545	460	385	280	140	1,815

Notes: Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 2 – Unemployment benefit claimants by age in Limavady DCA, October 2008 - 2011

Period	Age bands					All Claimants
	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 or over	
October 2008	295	205	145	115	50	805
January 2009	365	335	255	180	70	1,205
April 2009	445	350	270	180	70	1,320
July 2009	500	375	275	180	65	1,390
October 2009	470	345	295	180	60	1,350
January 2010	500	400	325	205	70	1,500
April 2010	465	415	340	195	85	1,495
July 2010	540	420	330	200	85	1,575
October 2010	500	390	310	215	90	1,505
January 2011	515	430	330	210	95	1,575
April 2011	490	410	335	205	85	1,525
July 2011	525	420	325	210	80	1,560
October 2011	520	395	320	220	90	1,545

Notes:

Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office, or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future. **(AQW 5219/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: My Department is fully committed to the Equality Agenda and this is evident in our new Equality Scheme, drawn up in April 2010 which details the actions we will take to ensure that equality of opportunity and good relations are positively promoted throughout all aspects of our work.

This includes screening all policies for equality and good relations impacts as recommended by the Equality Commission.

All previous actions are detailed in our Annual Progress Reports to the Equality Commission and these together with our new Equality Scheme are available on the DFP website.

Promoting equality of opportunity for all our citizens is an integral aspect of building a better future for everyone and as such underpins and influences all that we do in shaping a better society.

This includes the development of the Executive's budget and the Department of Finance and Personnel ensures that all departments consider how policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations and that funding requests take account of equality of opportunity and good relations considerations.

Block Grant

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Treasury in relation to the content of the Autumn Statement and the implications for Northern Ireland and the Block Grant allocation. **(AQW 5271/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: I have regular meetings with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to discuss a wide range of matters relating to the Northern Ireland Block Grant. Our most recent meeting was on 16 November 2011.

As a result of the Autumn Statement Northern Ireland will receive Barnett consequentials on comparable allocations to the budgets of Whitehall departments. In respect of Capital DEL this amounts to £134.1 million over the next three years. We have not yet received details of the Resource DEL implications. In addition we have received £7.4 million of Resource AME consequentials in respect of benefits.

Capital Investment

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the increased capital investment announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for his assessment of the implications for the capital expenditure budget; and if there are any plans to increase infrastructural investment.

(AQW 5298/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Chancellor's Autumn Statement resulted in additional capital DEL Barnett consequentials for Northern Ireland. This amounted to £23.8 million in 2012-13, 52.5 million in 2013-14 and £57.8 million in 2014-15.

These Barnett consequentials are unhypothecated and for allocation locally in line with the Executive's priorities. The only exception to this is some £14.3 million in respect of the housing package, which may only be used to fund loans and equity investments. A further condition is that 60 per cent of this housing funding must be returned to the Exchequer by 2019-20.

The Executive will now consider how to allocate the additional capital investment funding.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Dental Practice Allowance

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of dental practices which were in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance in each year since 2007 at (i) the lower level of four percent; and (ii) the higher level of eleven percent, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4921/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The number of dental practices which were in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance at (i) the lower level of four percent; and (ii) the higher level of eleven percent, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, are shown in the tables below. As the Practice Allowance is calculated biannually, figures have been provided for each six month period since April 2007.

Table 1: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, April 2007 - September 2007.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	13	54
Northern	10	61
South Eastern	12	38
Southern	10	38
Western	11	23
Northern Ireland	56	214

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 2: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, October 2007 - March 2008.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	4	60
Northern	3	69
South Eastern	5	45
Southern	3	44
Western	10	24
Northern Ireland	25	242

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 3: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, April 2008 - September 2008.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	4	62
Northern	9	66
South Eastern	4	46

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Southern	15	32
Western	13	22
Northern Ireland	45	228

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 4: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, October 2008 - March 2009.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	11	55
Northern	11	64
South Eastern	14	36
Southern	14	32
Western	11	24
Northern Ireland	61	211

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 5: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, April 2009 - September 2009.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	11	55
Northern	12	62
South Eastern	14	35
Southern	14	32
Western	10	24
Northern Ireland	61	208

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 6: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, October 2009 - March 2010.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	11	52
Northern	13	62
South Eastern	13	36
Southern	14	32
Western	10	24
Northern Ireland	61	206

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 7: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, April 2010 - September 2010.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	14	53
Northern	21	56
South Eastern	18	34
Southern	14	34
Western	15	22
Northern Ireland	82	199

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 8: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, October 2010 - March 2011.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	13	53
Northern	24	53
South Eastern	15	37
Southern	18	31
Western	15	22
Northern Ireland	85	196

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Table 9: Number of dental practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, April 2011 - September 2011.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	17	48
Northern	23	54
South Eastern	18	35
Southern	17	34
Western	17	22
Northern Ireland	92	193

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Notes

- Dental Practice Allowance is paid to a designated contractor for each practice, including Orthodontic practices. Where a designated contractor owns multiple practices these have been excluded from the figures, as they could not easily be separately identified.
- Some post payment adjustments may not be reflected in the figures; these adjustments may change a practice from 4% to 11% and vice versa.

Dental Practice Allowance

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of orthodontic practices which were in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance in each of the last six months at (i) the lower level of four percent; and (ii) the higher level of eleven percent, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4922/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of orthodontic practices which were in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance at (i) the lower level of four percent; and (ii) the higher level of eleven percent in the last six months, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, is shown in table 1 below. As the Practice Allowance is only calculated biannually, monthly figures cannot be provided.

Table 1: Number of orthodontic practices in receipt of the Dental Practice Allowance by Health and Social Care Trust, April 2011 - September 2011.

HSC Trust	Practices Receiving Allowance at 4%	Practices Receiving Allowance at 11%
Belfast	0	2
Northern	0	2
South Eastern	0	3
Southern	0	1
Western	0	3
Northern Ireland	0	11

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation

Notes

- Dental Practice Allowance is paid to a designated contractor for each practice. Where a designated contractor owns multiple practices these have been excluded from the figures, as they could not easily be separately identified.
- Some post payment adjustments may not be reflected in the figures; these adjustments may change a practice from 4% to 11% and vice versa.

- 5 An orthodontic practice is defined as a practice meeting the criteria set out in Determination XI 1 (1) (a) of the 2010/11 Statement of Dental Remuneration.

Residence Orders

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total cost of providing services to children subject to Residence Order proceedings in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4930/11-15)

Mr Poots: The cost of providing services to children subject to Residence Order proceedings in each of the last three years by Health and Social Care Trust area, is set out in the table below.

Residence Order costs	2010/11 Costs £	2009/10 Costs £	2008/09 Costs £
HSC Trust			
Belfast HSC Trust	210,694	257,696	162,355
Northern HSC Trust	429,493	437,404	434,262
South Eastern HSC Trust	576,833	460,719	400,269
Western HSC Trust	179,892	207,613	193,340
Southern HSC Trust	436,623	301,247	255,608
Total	1,833,535	1,664,679	1,445,834

Community Care: Older People

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that 15 percent of calls to Age NI are in relation to community care, how his Department intends to tailor the review of Health and Social Care Services to provide for the ageing population.

(AQW 4936/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Review of Health and Social Care Services is examining the future configuration and delivery of services across hospital, primary and community care settings. As part of its remit, the Review Team has been looking at issues of accessibility, safety and quality of services, and value for money. Services for older people have been raised with the Review Team during the extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the public. The Review's conclusions and recommendations will inform decisions on changes needed to our system. I intend to report to the Assembly shortly on the outcome of the Review.

Programme for Government

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential consequences for other aspects of the health budget arising from the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to allocate an increasing percentage of the overall health budget to public health.

(AQW 4995/11-15)

Mr Poots: The importance of early interventions and other initiatives which assist people to engage knowledgeably in regard to their own health, has long been advocated as an approach to reduce later costs to the health service, especially those related to treating chronic conditions which are all too often preventable e.g. lung cancer, Type 2 diabetes, liver disease. Allocating an increasing percentage of the overall health budget to public health, to enable a further emphasis on prevention, is therefore crucially important for the sustainability of the Health Service.

All aspects of health and social care service have a role to play in delivering preventative measures, and increasing funding in this arena will allow professionals more scope to pursue these elements of their work.

The commitment outlined in the draft Programme for Government will not be to the detriment of other services. Rather, it will lead to a more proactive health system that will allow surgeons, doctors and social workers better flexibility to meet the needs of their patients and clients.

Midwifery

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to encourage young people to pursue a career in midwifery. [R]

(AQW 5031/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department commissions 65 student midwifery places per year at Queen's University Belfast. There are two routes open to undergraduates who wish to study midwifery: a 3 year direct entry midwifery course (35 places) and an 18 month course for registered nurses (30 places) who wish undertake the midwifery qualification. Demand for student places for the 2011 intake remains high with 546 applications being received for the direct entry course and 72 for the 18 month course.

The Department publishes careers information for midwives on www.nidirect.gov.uk and commissioned the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for nurses and midwives to develop information specifically for school leavers, which is available on <http://www.nursingandmidwiferycareersni.com/>. In addition, the University and HSC Trusts work with local schools, colleges and community groups to promote midwifery as a career.

Multi-agency Support Teams for Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when all school children in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area will be able to avail of the Multi-Agency Support Team for Schools.

(AQW 5090/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Multi-Agency Support Teams for Schools (MASTS) Service has been operational within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust since 2007 with 137 schools already receiving services under the scheme.

MASTS plans to expand the service to the remaining 117 Primary and Nursery Schools by reviewing the model of service provision locally and through a planned review currently being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board in association with the Public Health Agency, to ensure that resources are being used effectively. That planned review is expected to be completed in mid 2012.

Multi-agency Support Teams for Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what criteria were used to determine (i) which schools were initially included in the Multi-Agency Support Teams for Schools scheme; and (ii) schools that have joined subsequently.

(AQW 5092/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Multi-Agency Support Teams for Schools (MASTS) service is run by the Health and Social Care Trusts in close collaboration with their respective Education and Library Boards. I am advised by Health and Social Care Trusts that access to services provided by the scheme has largely been through expressions of interest by individual schools and the pace of inclusion has been dependent on available resources.

In those Trust areas where not all schools are yet participating in the scheme, plans are in place to ensure that access is optimised through the issue of further invitations or review of particular service models to ensure that resources are used effectively.

Multi-agency Support Teams for Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to list the schools, in each District Council area, in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area (a) included in the Multi-Agency Support Teams for Schools (MASTS); (b) which have indicated an interest in joining MASTS; and (c) have not expressed a wish to join MASTS; and (ii) for his assessment of the effectiveness of MASTS to date.

(AQW 5093/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) I am advised by the Northern Trust that:
- (a) 137 schools are involved in the MASTS scheme
 - (b) 55 schools have indicated an interest in joining MASTS.
 - (c) 60 schools have not indicated an interest in joining

Tab A lists these schools by District Council area.

- (ii) Evidence indicates effectiveness of the service as follows:
- 78% of Principals and 69% of teachers highlighted that children benefited from intervention from the MASTS service;
 - 95% of parents/carers highlighted that their child benefited from support provided by the MASTS team in the school setting;
 - 79% of parents/carers felt the support provided by MASTS had a positive impact on the child's learning; and
 - 92% of children interviewed stated that they would recommend MASTS to a friend.

Effectiveness has also been recognised by the achievement of a number of national, regional and local awards.

Tab A

Antrim District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Annhorish PS, Toome	Creavery PS	Carlane PS
2	Antrim PS	Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach, Cromghlinn	St Mac Nissius' PS, Tannaghmore
3	Ballycraig PS	Straidhavern PS	

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
4	Creggan PS		
5	Crumlin PS		
6	Duneane PS		
7	Greystone PS		
8	Groggan PS		
9	Loanends PS		
10	Maine Integrated PS		
11	Millquarter PS		
12	Moneynick PS		
13	Mount Saint Michael's PS & NU		
14	Parkhall PS		
15	Randalstown Central PS		
16	Rathenraw PS		
17	Round Tower PS		
18	St Comgall's PS, Antrim		
19	St Joseph's PS, Antrim		
20	St Joseph's NS, Antrim		
21	St Joseph's PS & NU, Crumlin		
22	St Oliver Plunketts PS & NS, Toomebridge		
23	Steeple NS		
24	Templepatrick PS & NU		

Ballymena District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Ballykeel PS & NU	Buick Memorial PS & NU	Braid PS
2	Ballymena NS	Camphill PS	Carnaghts PS
3	Ballymena PS	Clough PS & NU	Glenravel PS
4	Braidside Integrated PS & NU	Dunclug PS	Hazelbank PS
5	Broughshane PS & NU	Fourtowns PS	Longstone PS
6	Carniny PS	Kirkinriola PS	St Mary's PS, Cargan
7	Dunclug NS	Moorfields PS	St Paul's PS, Ahoghill
8	Gracehill PS & NU		The Diamond PS, Cullybackey
9	Harryville PS & NU		
10	Kells & Connor PS		
11	Portglenone PS		
12	St Brigid's PS, Ballymena		
13	St Colmcilles's PS		
14	St Mary's, PS & NU Portglenone		

Ballymoney District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Ballymoney NS	Carrowreagh PS	Bushvalley PS
2	Ballymoney Model PS	Knockahollet PS	Cloughmill's PS
3	Balnamore PS	Leaney PS	Garryduff PS
4	Dalriada Prep	St Brigid's PS, Cloughmills	Kilmoyle PS & NU
5	Eden PS, Ballymoney	St Joseph's PS, Dunloy	Lislagan PS

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
6	Landhead PS		William Pinkerton Memorial PS
7	Rasharkin PS		
8	St Anne's PS, Corkey		
9	St Brigid's PS, Ballymoney		
10	St Patrick's PS & NU, Loughgiel		
11	St Patrick's PS & NU, Rasharkin		

Carrickfergus District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Acorn IPS	Carrickfergus Model PS	Ballycarry PS
2	Carrickfergus Central PS	St Nicholas PS, Carrickfergus	
3	Eden PS, Carrickfergus	Sunnylands PS	
4	Oakfield PS & NU	Whitehead PS & NU	
5	Silverstream PS & NU	Woodlawn PS	
6	Sunnylands NS		
7	Woodburn PS		
8	Victoria PS & NU		

Cookstown District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Ballylifford PS	Donaghey PS	Ballytree PS
2	Cookstown NS	Lissan PS	Churchtown PS
3	Cookstown PS	Sacred Heart PS, Rock	Coagh PS
4	Crievagh PS	St Patrick's PS, Loup	Phoenix Integrated PS
5	Derrychrin PS	St Patrick's PS, Moneymore	St Malachy's PS, Drumullen
6	Holy Trinity PS & NU		Stewartstown PS
7	Moneymore PS & NU		
8	Orritor PS & NU		
9	Queen Elizabeth II PS		
10	St Joseph's PS, Killeenan		
11	St Mary's PS, Dunamore		
12	St Mary's PS, Pomeroy		
13	St Mary's PS, Stewartstown		
14	St Patrick's PS, Ardboe		
15	St Peter's PS & NU Moortown		

Coleraine District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Ballysally NS	Ballyhackett PS	Culcrow PS
2	Ballysally PS	Carhill PS	DH Christie Memorial PS
3	Carnalridge PS	Macosquin PS	Garvagh PS
4	Castleroe PS	Portstewart PS & NU	Gorran PS
5	Crossroads PS	St Patrick's & St Joseph's Federated PS, Garvagh	Hezlett PS
6	Cullycapple PS		St Colum's PS, Portstewart
7	Damhead PS		St Malachy's PS Coleraine

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
8	Harpur's Hill PS & Cuirrath Corner NU		St Mary's PS & NU, Cushendall
9	Killowen PS		
10	Kilrea PS		
11	Kylemore NS		
12	The Irish Society PS & NU		
13	Milburn PS		
14	Mill Strand NS & PU		
15	Portrush PS		
16	St Columba's PS, Garvagh		
17	St Columba's PS & NU, Kilrea		
18	St John's PS, Coleraine		
19	St Patrick's PS, Portrush		

Larne District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Carnlough IPS	Corran PS & NU	Carnalbanagh PS, Glenarm
2		Kilcoan PS	Carncastle PS
3		Larne & Inver IPS	Glynn PS
4		Linn PS & NU	Seaview PS, Glenarm
5		Mullaghduh PS	St Anthony's NS, Larne
6		Olderfleet PS	St Anthonys PS, Larne
7		Toreagh PS	St John's PS, Carnlough
8			St MacNissi's PS, Larne

Magherafelt District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Castledawson PS	Ampertaine PS	Altayeskey PS
2	Drumard PS	Bellaghy PS	Gaelscoil An tSeanchai PS, Magherafelt
3	Holy Family PS & NU	Desertmartin PS	Culnady PS
4	Knockloughrim PS	Gaelscoil Na Speirini PS, Draperstown	Kilross PS
5	Magherafelt NS	Maghera PS	Knocknagin PS
6	St Brigid's PS, Mayogall	New Row PS	Magherafelt PS
7	St Columba's PS, Straw	St Brigid's PS, Tirkane	St Eoghan's PS, Draperstown
8	St John Bosco PS	St Columba's PS, Desertmartin	St Trea's, PS, Ballyronan
9	St John's PS, Swatragh	St Mary's PS, Draperstown	Tobermore PS
10	St Mary's PS & NU, Bellaghy		
11	St Mary's PS, Glenview		
12	St Mary's PS, Greenlough		
13	St Patrick's PS, Glen		
14	Spires IPS		
15	Woods PS		

Moyle District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Armoy PS	Barnish PS	Bushmills PS & NU
2	Ballycastle IPS	St Ciaran's PS Cushendun	Dunseverick PS
3	Ballytober PS		St Mary's, PS, Rathlin
4	Gaelescoil an Chaistil PS		St Olcan's PS Armoy
5	Glenann PS, Cushendall		Straidbilly PS
6	Moyle PS & NU, Larne		
7	St Patricks & St Brigids PS & NU, Ballycastle		
8	St Patrick's PS, Glenariffe		

Newtownabbey District Council Area

	Schools involved in MASTS initiative	Schools who have applied to join since the closing date	Schools who have not applied
1	Abbots Cross PS	Ballyclare NS	Ballyhenry PS
2	Ashgrove PS	Ballyclare PS	Carmoney PS
3	Ashgrove NS	Doagh PS	Hollybank PS
4	Ballyhenry NS	Gaelscoil Eanna, Gleann Ghormlaithe	Kilbride Central PS
5	Ballynure PS	King's Park PS	St Mary's-on-the-Hill PS, Newtownabbey
6	Earlview PS & NU	St MacNissi's PS, Newtownabbey	Tildarg PS
7	Fairview PS	Upper Ballyboley PS	Whiteabbey PS
8	Glengormley Integrated PS		
9	Greenisland PS		
10	Mallusk PS		
11	Monkstown NS		
12	Mossgrove PS & NU		
13	Mossley NS		
14	Mossley PS		
15	Parkgate PS		
16	Rathcoole PS & NU		
17	St Bernard's PS & NU, Newtownabbey		
18	St James PS & NU, Newtownabbey		
19	Straid PS		
20	Tir-na-Nóg PS		
21	The Thompson PS		
22	Whitehouse PS & NU		

Dental Patients

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the change in the number of patients who were registered with a General Dental Practitioner, under the Health Service arrangements, between October 2010 and October 2011, broken down by age group and locality.

(AQW 5097/11-15)

Mr Poots: The change in the number of patients who were registered with a General Dental Practitioner, under the Health Service arrangements, between October 2010 and October 2011, broken down by age group and locality, is shown in table 1 below.

Patients are assigned to a Local Government District on the postcode of the practice at which they are registered. Patients are not necessarily resident in the Local Government District in which their practice is located.

Table 1: Change in the number of patients who were registered with a General Dental Practitioner, under the Health Service arrangements, between October 2010 and October 2011.

Local Government District	Age Group							Total
	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-12	13-17	18-64	65+	
Antrim	39	280	216	243	356	3,085	651	4,870
Ards	-73	137	270	137	392	3,257	971	5,091
Armagh	7	150	163	203	290	3,029	636	4,478
Ballymena	19	196	249	263	451	4,598	1,081	6,857
Ballymoney	2	94	96	64	147	1,777	457	2,637
Banbridge	138	165	274	176	414	2,938	491	4,596
Belfast	167	1,374	1,207	1,005	2,190	20,311	3,713	29,967
Carrickfergus	51	161	142	89	219	2,268	532	3,462
Castlereagh	113	321	226	220	334	4,685	1,062	6,961
Coleraine	29	205	133	135	422	3,584	937	5,445
Cookstown	63	107	85	105	175	2,159	330	3,024
Craigavon	11	427	369	391	668	6,391	1,264	9,521
Derry	119	582	447	499	905	10,050	1,348	13,950
Down	136	401	269	223	670	5,308	1,178	8,185
Dungannon	94	291	158	245	395	3,752	682	5,617
Fermanagh	6	218	176	211	336	2,923	569	4,439
Larne	-11	28	65	85	58	1,243	405	1,873
Limavady	1	152	78	97	158	1,982	388	2,856
Lisburn	179	599	297	391	800	7,271	1,381	10,918
Magherafelt	75	211	134	190	361	2,815	465	4,251
Moyle	9	54	40	56	85	897	206	1,347
Newry & Mourne	71	451	289	443	933	7,133	1,144	10,464
Newtownabbey	21	327	328	297	563	6,043	1,252	8,831
North Down	70	323	211	180	450	5,234	1,233	7,701
Omagh	52	130	210	122	341	2,757	359	3,971
Strabane	4	201	152	97	379	2,849	518	4,200
Northern Ireland	1,392	7,585	6,284	6,167	12,492	118,339	23,253	175,512

Dental Patients: Waiting Times

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the waiting time a for new patient to receive treatment under Health Service arrangements in each dental practice in County Fermanagh.

(AQW 5127/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Ballymena Health and Care Centre

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the development of Ballymena Health and Care Centre.

(AQW 5129/11-15)

Mr Poots: A business case setting out the detailed proposals for the new Ballymena Health and Care Centre has been developed. I have instigated work to consider how best to progress a range of new Health and Care Centres, including Ballymena. This will look at financing options both conventional and private with a view to early delivery of these projects together with the most cost-effective procurement methodology.

Whilst this review is progressing I have given approval for the enabling works for the new Ballymena Health and Care Centre to commence and work is expected to start on site shortly. It will only progress however, if all primary care providers are committed to the proposal.

Head Injury: Glass Bottle

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the cost of treating a head injury caused by being struck by a glass bottle on the head or on the face, including the cost of ambulance call out to Belfast city centre, the cost of an x-ray, the cost of stitching or stapling of a wound, and the average cost of further medical attention, such as follow up appointments, removal of stitches, and dental work.

(AQW 5143/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to detail this information as it can only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Kinship Carers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many kinship carers, of children with 'looked after' status, are currently receiving allowances under the Model Payment Scheme.

(AQW 5150/11-15)

Mr Poots: All 'looked after' children, whether in foster care/kinship foster care, receive allowances under the Model Payment Scheme.

Kinship Carers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many kinship carers, of children who are subject to (i) Residence Orders; and (ii) Supervision Orders, are currently receiving financial support packages from his Department.

(AQW 5151/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below reflects the number of kinship carers of children, who are subject to (i) Residence Orders; and (ii) Supervision Orders and who are currently in receipt of financial support packages from Health and Social Care Trusts.

TRUST	Residence Orders	Supervision Orders
Northern*	56	0
Southern	53	0
Belfast	0	8
South Eastern	9	50
Western	18	0

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

* The Northern HSC Trust has indicated that this figure includes both kinship and non-kinship carers as they are unable to provide a break down. The Trust has also indicated that a significant proportion of the total number are kinship foster carers.

Care Arrangements

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation processes exist within the Trusts to gauge the views and experiences of (i) kinship carers; (ii) children subject to Care Orders; (iii) children subject to Residence Orders; (iv) children subject to Supervision Orders; and (v) other kinship care arrangements; and for how long these arrangements have been in place.

(AQW 5162/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts employ a range of mechanisms to gauge the views and assess the experience of kinship carers, the children in their care and those children who are subject to Care Orders. The full range of mechanisms has been in place over a long period of time; some were established under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Not all mechanisms were put in place simultaneously; rather they have evolved over time. Examples of how Trusts gauge the views and assess the experience of looked after children and kinship carers include: Assessment processes; Approvals Panels; Looked After Children (LAC) Reviews; Annual Foster Carers' Reviews; Link workers; Service User groups for Looked After Children; Fostering Network; 24 hr emergency helpline; the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF); statutory monthly visits; Care Planning meetings; monthly meetings in Residential homes; Personal Advisors; Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) CASI Project and Advocacy Service; Complaints processes; attendance at staff meetings by young people age 16+; nominated social workers; Family Intervention and Placement Teams; Independent visitors and Text messaging. The list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Not all mechanisms are employed by all five Health and Social Care Trusts. Some are a statutory requirement, for example, assessment and review processes. Children, who are subject to Residence Orders and Supervision Orders are not looked after and, consequently, are not subject to statutory review processes; nor are children cared for in other kinship care arrangements, which sit outside of the looked after children framework.

Children in Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children who are currently subject to (i) Care Orders; (ii) Residence Orders; (iii) other kinship care arrangements; are (a) statemented; and (b) subject to Special Guardianship Orders that have been issued in another jurisdiction.

(AQW 5163/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures are not available in the format requested. However, Table 1 below details the numbers of looked after children in kinship care placements by legal status in respect of Care Orders and 'Other' Legal Orders, subject to a statement of Special Educational Need and in care for twelve months or longer at 30 September 2010.

Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders issued in another jurisdiction do not confer 'looked after status' on a child, so children subject to these Orders could not be placed in any form of 'looked after' kinship care.

Table 1

Legal Status	Statement of Special Educational Need	
	Yes	No
Care Orders	31	277
'Other' Legal Status	11	93
Total	42	370

Source: Community Information Branch Return OC2 2009/10. 'Care Orders' includes Interim and Deemed Care Orders, and 'Other' Legal Status includes, 'Accommodated' under various Articles of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The data detailed in Table 1 above are provisional.

Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast: Cardiac Patients

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) target time; and (ii) average time between cardiac patients completing a treadmill test at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast and their results being received by their General Practitioner.

(AQW 5166/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) There is no target specifically relating to the reporting time of results for the treadmill test.
- (ii) The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has informed me that the average

time between cardiac patients completing a treadmill test at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast and their results being dispatched to the General Practitioner (based on patients referred during the quarter ending 30th September 2011), was 2.28 days for patients referred by the rapid access chest pain clinic or directly from their GP and 24.7 days for patients referred by a cardiac consultant.

Causeway Hospital: Dermatology

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time for an appointment with a consultant at the Dermatology Department at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and how this compares to the last five years.

(AQW 5192/11-15)

Mr Poots: From the quarter ending June 2008 there were substantial changes in how data on waiting times for a first outpatient appointment were collected, with aggregate weekly time bands replacing a series of three monthly timebands. Therefore, to allow comparison, information is provided for the last four years.

While it is not possible to calculate an average waiting time from data collected in aggregate timebands, it is possible to calculate the median timeband, a similar statistical measure.

The median waiting times for an appointment with a consultant at the Dermatology Department at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine at 30th September 2011, and for each of the three years previous, is shown in the table below.

	Median Waiting Time
30th Sep 2011	Greater than 13 weeks but waiting no longer than 21 weeks
30th Sep 2010	Greater than 9 weeks but waiting no longer than 13 weeks
30th Sep 2009	Waiting no longer than 6 weeks
30th Sep 2008	Waiting no longer than 6 weeks

Source: Northern Health and Social Care Trust and Departmental Return CH3

Residential Care: South Eastern Trust

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people, aged over 65, in full-time residential care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area with (i) dementia; (ii) Alzheimers Disease; and (iii) learning disabilities.

(AQW 5218/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust indicated that, at 27th November 2011,:

- (i) there were 109 residents, aged over 65, in full-time statutory residential care with dementia in their Trust.
- (ii) the majority of their residents have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease. However, a manual review of medical assessments on file would be required in order to identify the number of people, aged over 65, in full-time residential care with Alzheimer's disease and therefore it could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
- (iii) there were fewer than five residents, aged over 65, in full-time statutory residential care with learning disabilities in their Trust.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office, or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.

(AQW 5220/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department adheres to the principles of a shared future. A key part of this is the ongoing work tackling health inequalities which continues to be a priority issue and this, along with the approach to mainstreaming good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation, will be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

My Department is currently developing a new cross government public health strategic framework which will build on Investing for Health and contribute to a better shared future for everyone.

Residential Care

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, at 25 November 2011, the number of places in residential care that were available for (i) people over the age of 65; (ii) people with dementia; (iii) people with Alzhiemer's Disease; and (iv) people with adult learning difficulties.

(AQW 5259/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures are not available in the format requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, the tables below detail the average number of available places in residential accommodation for (1) elderly persons, (2) persons designated mentally ill and (3) persons with a learning disability during the year ending 31 March 2011.

Table 1: Residential Accommodation for Elderly Persons during year ending 31 March 2011

HSC Trust	Average Available Places				
	Statutory	Voluntary	Private	Dual Registered	Total
Belfast	311	430	258	87	1,086
Northern	436	0	*	*	436
South Eastern	275	207	385	54	921
Southern	120	41	130	146	437
Western	249	56	201	127	633
Northern Ireland	1,391	734	974	414	3,513

* The Northern HSC Trust could not provide figures for the average available places in private and dual registered homes.

Source: KEL1

Table 2: Residential Accommodation for Persons Designated Mentally Ill during year ending 31 March 2011

HSC Trust	Average Available Places				
	Statutory	Voluntary	Private	Dual Registered	Total
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	30	0	0	0	30
South Eastern	3	50	0	0	53
Southern	0	0	0	0	0

HSC Trust	Average Available Places				
	Statutory	Voluntary	Private	Dual Registered	Total
Western	111	140	22	0	273
Northern Ireland	144	190	22	0	356

Source: KMI1

Table 3: Residential Accommodation for Persons with a Learning Disability during year ending 31 March 2011

HSC Trust	Average Available Places				
	Statutory	Voluntary	Private	Dual Registered	Total
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	15	0	0	0	15
South Eastern	6	94	83	0	183
Southern	8	18	79	3	108
Western	51	109	73	0	233
Northern Ireland	80	221	235	3	539

Source: KMH1

The information presented in Tables 1-3 above does not include nursing homes. Also, data relating to dual registered homes includes residential places only.

This information is provisional and will be published in 'Adult Community Statistics for Northern Ireland' in January 2012.

Midwives

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of midwives who are employed in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 5292/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Number of Midwives employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care by Trust at September 2011

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	353	266.74
Northern	230	181.36
South Eastern	243	186.56
Southern	285	212.24
Western	214	175.68

Source: Human Resources Management System

Note: WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.

Pharmaceutical Companies: Sponsorship

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the transparency that exists in the recording of conferences, seminars and overseas visits that are sponsored by Pharmaceutical companies and which may promote the use of specific drugs, and are attended by General Practitioners and other medical professionals.

(AQW 5297/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), which represents the UK pharmaceutical industry, has developed a Code of Practice for the Pharmaceutical industry to ensure ethical dealings between pharmaceutical companies and all those with whom they interact including General Practitioners and other health care professionals. This code is accepted by virtually all pharmaceutical companies operating in the UK and clearly stipulates the necessity for transparency in disclosure and recording of all relevant information by pharmaceutical companies when sponsoring conferences, seminars and overseas visits.

The code of practice for the Pharmaceutical Industry is available to view at the following link: <http://www.abpi.org.uk/our-work/library/guidelines/Pages/code-2011.aspx>

Furthermore, health care professions working in HSC Trusts and across primary care also have their own professional codes of ethics and guides, closely linked to the Pharmaceutical Industries code and DHSSPS guidance, which cover their own professional conduct in engagement with the pharmaceutical industry.

Complementary and Alternative Medicines: Pilot

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the Complementary and Alternative Medicines Pilot Project carried out in May 2008 by Social and Market Research; and whether it is useful for victims and survivors of the Troubles; and (ii) what plans he has to build on the success of the pilot project.

(AQW 5301/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) I understand from the assessment carried out by Social and Market Research (SMR) into the Complementary and Alternate Medicines (CAM) Pilot Project funded by my Department in 2007/2008 that the patient experience was positively reported.

The pilot aimed to treat patients with acute or chronic conditions who were referred by their GP. The independent evaluation carried out by SMR on the pilot did not specifically ask a patient about the cause of their condition. It is not possible, therefore, using the information gathered for the evaluation, to say how useful treatments available through the pilot would be for victims or survivors of the Troubles.

- (ii) In the light of the constrained budgetary environment faced by my Department I need to focus my resources on sustaining existing frontline health and social care services. As a result it is not possible to allocate any funding for CAM services during the current spending period.

Psychologists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current number of (i) qualified psychologists; and (ii) trainee psychologists, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 5358/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The information for qualified psychologists is given in the table below.

Clinical Psychologists employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care by Trust as at 30 September 2011

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	74	66.60
Northern	40	33.91
South Eastern	43	38.46
Southern	29	26.23
Western	29	27.72
Total	215	192.92

Source: Human Resources Management System

Note: WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent.

- (ii) Trainee Psychologists are not employed directly by Trusts. They are employed by the Business Services Organisation and seconded to the Doctor of Clinical Psychology course at Queen's University, Belfast. Over the three year course they have five placements, the vast majority of which are within the five Trusts, although some are placed within voluntary bodies. With placements changing at least every six months, the numbers on placement in any Trust will vary considerably from year to year. As at 30 September 2011, there were 51 (50.06 whole-time equivalent) trainee psychologists employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (**Source:** Human Resources Management System).

Department of Justice

Maghaberry Prison: Separation of Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of operating the facilities for separated prisoners in Roe House, Maghaberry Prison, including staffing costs, in the last twelve months.

(AQW 4438/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): It is not possible to provide the precise information requested as staff costs relating to separated prisoners are not costed separately and both Bush House and Roe House hold both separated and integrated prisoners.

The additional staff required for the two houses, because of separation, cost £1,408,354 in the last year.

Excluding staff costs, the budget for prisoners housed in separated conditions does not attract any additional resource funding, as their accommodation, food and amenities costs do not differ from the integrated population.

The total non-payroll cost of running Roe House in the last twelve months is £104,761.

Prisoners: Crime in Prison

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners were (i) charged; (ii) prosecuted; and (iii) convicted of crimes carried out while they were in prison in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4574/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not readily available and can only be collated at a disproportionate cost to the public purse.

Prisons: Contingency Accommodation

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what contingency accommodation is being considered by the Prison Service as a result of the increasing prison population.

(AQW 4863/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is giving consideration to contingency arrangements to deal with the rise in the prison population. These include the increased use of doubling in single cell accommodation, together with a range of options to provide additional capacity. Consideration is being given to the development of additional accommodation within the existing prison sites, together with the examination of other options, including the use of the former borstal at Millisle (Lisnevin). If, at the end of the review, the use of Lisnevin is considered worthwhile, NIPS will ensure that the process is a transparent one, including early discussions with local representatives.

In addition to developing contingency arrangements, NIPS is also currently developing a refreshed Prison Estates Strategy which will outline proposals focused on meeting the diverse needs of our growing prison population.

Maghaberry Prison: Body Searches

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the scanner which would remove the need for body searches of prisoners at Maghaberry Prison has been installed; and, if so, when it was installed and how much it cost.

(AQW 4893/11-15)

Mr Ford: The agreement of 12 August 2010 led to the installation of a separated prisoner search facility with the use of X ray specialist search equipment and the introduction of a BOSS Chair. This facility has been operational since November 2010 and has removed the requirement for routine Full Body Searches within Maghaberry. However there is still a requirement for Full Body Searches on entry and exit.

The cost of the specialist search equipment and Boss Chairs installed in Maghaberry was £35,768.

Small Claims: Civil Processing Centre

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many Information Missing Claims were returned by staff of the Small Claims Civil Processing Centre in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4920/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information is not available in the format sought. The table below details the number of small claims applications which were returned for query and the number which were returned for query more than once. Figures are also provided on the number of applications returned for query but which remain outstanding.

The majority of small claims applications are returned because of incorrect fees or missing information such as failure to specify the amount claimed, failure to include the full details of the parties or failure to date or sign the application.

Small Claims Applications	2008	2009	2010	Total
Cases lodged	13542	13902	13269	40713
Cases Returned for Query	2867	2196	1742	6805
Cases Returned for Query more than once	320	171	200	691
Cases Returned for Query which remain outstanding	203	122	115	440

I am satisfied that the current Small Claims Guide provides comprehensive and clear instructions on the process for submitting a small claims application. Given that the most recent revision of the Guide was carried out in July 2011, I have no plans to commission a further review at this time.

Small Claims Court: Guide

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the clarity of the Guide to the Small Claims Court in Northern Ireland; and whether there are any plans to review or amend this guide.

(AQW 4923/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information is not available in the format sought. The table below details the number of small claims applications which were returned for query and the number which were returned for query more than once. Figures are also provided on the number of applications returned for query but which remain outstanding.

The majority of small claims applications are returned because of incorrect fees or missing information such as failure to specify the amount claimed, failure to include the full details of the parties or failure to date or sign the application.

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I am satisfied that the current Small Claims Guide provides comprehensive and clear instructions on the process for submitting a small claims application. Given that the most recent revision of the Guide was carried out in July 2011, I have no plans to commission a further review at this time.

Small Claims: Civil Processing Centre

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, how many Information Missing Claims that were identified and returned by the Small Claims Civil Processing Centre were not returned to it with the relevant missing information.

(AQW 4926/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information is not available in the format sought. The table below details the number of small claims applications which were returned for query and the number which were returned for query more than once. Figures are also provided on the number of applications returned for query but which remain outstanding.

The majority of small claims applications are returned because of incorrect fees or missing information such as failure to specify the amount claimed, failure to include the full details of the parties or failure to date or sign the application.

Small Claims Applications	2008	2009	2010	Total
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Cases Returned for Query which remain outstanding	203	122	115	440

I am satisfied that the current Small Claims Guide provides comprehensive and clear instructions on the process for submitting a small claims application. Given that the most recent revision of the Guide was carried out in July 2011, I have no plans to commission a further review at this time.

Historical Enquiries Team

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice, since its creation, how many enquiries by the Historical Enquiries Team have been carried out on behalf of families from the (i) Protestant community; and (ii) Catholic community.

(AQW 4942/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am advised by the HET that they do not record the information you have requested regarding the community background of families.

Maghaberry Prison: Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4030/11-15, for a breakdown of the £1,007,000 cost of the damage caused by Republican separated prisoners.

(AQW 4966/11-15)

Mr Ford: A full breakdown of the £1,007,000 cost of the damage caused by republican separated prisoners, during the two separate periods of protest, is shown below:

First, in relation to damage caused during protests in 2010, the total cost incurred was £506,680, broken down as:

Damage to recreation room on 4 April 2010:	£ 17,000
Cell damage on 6 May 2010:	£ 13,500
Cleaning cost of protest:	£187,153
Refurbishment of Roe three and four landings following suspension of protest on 12 August 2010:	£141,317
Responding to the protest also resulted in additional staffing costs of:	£147,710

Second, in relation to damage caused as a result of the protests in 2011, disclosed in AQW 3777/11-15, the total cost is £500,320, broken down as:

Cell damage on 6 May 2011:	£ 8,800
Cell damage on 30 June 2011:	£ 5,600
Cell damage on 1 July 2011:	£ 6,400
Fire damage to recreation room on 1 July 2011:	£199,100
Cleaning cost of ongoing protest in the financial year to date:	£157,005
Responding to the protest has also resulted in additional staffing costs of:	£123,415

Crime Against Older and Vulnerable People

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to tackle crime against older and vulnerable people, for their assessment of mandatory sentences; and whether he anticipates their introduction. (AQW 5050/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sentencing in the individual case is, and should remain, a matter for the judiciary. In making sentencing decisions, the judiciary are guided by sentencing guidelines, which indicate that courts should treat the age and vulnerability of the victim as an aggravating factor when assessing the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The Lord Chief Justice has recently announced a priority list of areas where sentencing guidance for the judiciary will be developed. The principles underlying sentencing, expressed in this guidance, will include attacks on the vulnerable, including older people, as an aggravating factor in sentencing decisions.

Under the Programme for Government my Department is committed to tackling crime and fear of crime against older and vulnerable people, which will be part of the Community Safety Strategy to be published in the New Year. Alongside this work, I am currently considering a range of potential mechanisms by which greater transparency, consistency and understanding of sentencing practice might be delivered in a manner that will promote public confidence. I hope to announce proposals on the way forward in the near future.

Maghaberry Prison: Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4025/11-15, whether he receives regular briefings on the on-going Republican separated prisoner protest; and whether he will ascertain why the protest is continuing despite the prisoners demands having been met.

(AQW 5059/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do receive regular briefings on the on-going republican separated prisoner protest.

Whilst much of the Agreement of 12 August 2010 has been implemented, including those elements relating to search arrangements, it is not correct that all prisoner demands have been met.

I would refer the member to the previous response; AQW 2902/11-15 issued on 20 October. That position remains unchanged.

DOJ: Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to his Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 5104/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into existence on 12th April 2010. Details of expenditure before that date are a matter for the previous department.

In the 2010/11 financial year the Department, excluding agencies and non departmental public bodies, spend £59,758 on staff mileage claims.

Maghaberry Prison: Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what precautions are in place to protect prison staff against infection and bacteria from the Republican separated prisoners who are refusing to wash, particularly when transferring them to and from court.

(AQW 5113/11-15)

Mr Ford: No separated prisoners are refusing to wash. All separated prisoners shower and change into clean clothes before leaving the residential landing. This mitigates the likelihood of any contamination, bacterial or otherwise, being spread to other areas.

Staff working in the relevant areas are provided with Personal Protective Equipment and the areas are regularly cleaned by appropriately trained industrial cleaners.

Regular inspections are carried out by an Environmental Health Consultant to ensure suitable hygiene standards are maintained.

Maghaberry Prison: Protest

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Justice to explain his decision to (i) suspend visits to HMP Maghaberry on 25 and 26 November; and (ii) award all prisoners £5 in phone credit; and for an estimate of the cost that will be associated with the dissident republican protest due to be staged over the two dates.

(AQW 5123/11-15)

Mr Ford: Visits were suspended on 25 and 26 November as the Governor of Maghaberry Prison considered it would not be possible to guarantee that it could provide safe access to all visitors coming onto the prison estate, due to the protest by dissident republicans outside the prison.

All prisoners were given £5 phone credit in order to allow them to keep in touch with their families while visits were cancelled for the duration of the protest. The cost of phone credit provided was paid from the Prisoners' Amenity fund and not from public funds.

The estimated cost of the joint operation between NIPS and PSNI to deal with the protest is £222,866.

Prisoners: On Remand

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many current remand prisoners were initially granted bail but have since had this revoked because of they breached their release conditions.

(AQW 5128/11-15)

Mr Ford: As at 28 November 2011, 76 defendants were on remand in custody as a result of bail revocation following a breach of bail conditions.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how much funding his Department has provided for Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5131/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into being on the 12 April 2010, since that time my Department has provided £25,000 funding in each financial year towards the promotion and establishment of Neighbourhood Watch in Northern Ireland. It is worth noting the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Policing Board also provide funding for Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

At present funding for Neighbourhood Watch is available to Community Safety Partnerships, District Policing Partnerships and local Neighbourhood Policing Teams to enhance and promote Neighbourhood Watch at a local level.

Community Safety Warden Schemes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice, given that older peoples' fear of crime is higher than the level of crime against them, for his assessment of whether the funding of Community Safety Warden schemes is a better option than increasing the funding for Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

(AQW 5132/11-15)

Mr Ford: The safety of older and vulnerable people, and ensuring that they can live free from the fear of crime, is a priority for my Department.

Crimes against older and vulnerable members of the community, whilst relatively rare, can have a disproportionate impact on the victim and wider community.

The forthcoming Community Safety Strategy will include proposals to address fear of crime amongst older and vulnerable people, and the draft Programme for Government, includes a commitment to tackle crime and fear of crime against older and vulnerable people by more effective and appropriate sentences and other measures.

Neighbourhood Watch schemes are currently operated in residential areas and are run by volunteer co-ordinators. Community Safety Wardens schemes operate in targeted areas where crime and anti-social behaviour have been identified as problems and are staffed by paid employees.

Both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Safety Warden schemes have been demonstrated to improve feelings of safety within the communities in which they operate and, as such, both schemes have a different, but equally important, role to play in contributing to community safety and reducing the fear of crime.

At present I do not intend to change the funding available to either of these schemes.

Maghaberry Prison: Planters

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4131/11-15, when the decision was taken to make the planters; and when the work began and was completed.

(AQW 5159/11-15)

Mr Ford: The decision to make planters was taken in July 2010 and work commenced within the same month. The work was completed in November 2011.

Electronic Tagging

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the effectiveness of electronic tagging; and whether there is evidence that it prevents reoffending.

(AQW 5169/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since April 2009 courts have had the ability to impose a curfew with an electronic monitoring requirement as a condition of bail, community sentence or post-custodial licence. An electronic tag monitors an individual's compliance with a curfew condition which, together with other conditions imposed by the court, is intended principally to enhance levels of public protection.

Whilst the wearing of an electronic tag cannot of course prevent a determined offender from committing further offences, it is a very useful tool in confirming their presence at a designated address during the curfew period and in identifying curfew breaches which might otherwise have gone undetected.

An electronic monitoring requirement is rarely the only condition imposed on an individual by the court, making it difficult to definitively assess its effectiveness in preventing reoffending in isolation from other bail, sentence or licence conditions aimed at achieving the same effect. However, it is an effective technology which has been embraced positively by the judiciary and criminal justice agencies and is helping to limit the potential for reoffending whilst the individual is subject to an electronic monitoring requirement.

Failure to Surrender

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured against people who failed to surrender to custody after being released on bail in each of the last two years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 5170/11-15)

Mr Ford: Failing to surrender to custody offences may be prosecuted under Article 5(2) Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for failing to surrender to custody offences by court division 2007-2008

Court division	2007	2008
Antrim	0	0
Ards	0	0
Armagh and South Down	1	1
Belfast	1	0
Craigavon and Lisburn	0	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	0
Londonderry	0	0
Total	4	1

It is particularly important on this occasion to note that the Department's data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. In practice, failing to surrender to custody is unlikely to be the principal offence charged.

Criminal Trials

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many criminal trials have been aborted in each of the last three years because of the admission of inadmissible evidence or another procedural irregularity; (ii) how many of these were the consequence of something said or done by (a) the prosecution; (b) the defence; or (c) the judge; and (iii) what was the total cost of these trials in each year.

(AQW 5181/11-15)

Mr Ford: The reasons recorded for an aborted trial do not always assign responsibility to a particular individual or organisation and therefore it is not possible to categorize the reasons as outlined in the question.

The number and reasons recorded for aborted¹ trials are set out in the table below:

1 Figures do not include cases where the defendants changed their plea to guilty or pleaded guilty to a lesser charge on the day of trial.

Year	Total	Reason Recorded for Aborted Trial
2008	7	Jurors knew prosecution witnesses.
		Judge recused himself.
		Prejudicial information raised during Defence cross-examination of prosecution witness.
2008	7	Juror unavailability.
		Prejudicial information raised by Defence counsel during cross examination of prosecution witness.
		Juror knew father of injured party.
		Prejudicial evidence of prosecution witness during evidence in chief.
2009	10	Reliability of prosecution witness evidence.
		Prosecution witness indicated that his answer to a Defence counsel question during cross examination would prejudice the defendant's trial.
		Witness not available.
		Prejudicial evidence of prosecution witness during evidence in chief.
		A number of jurors indicated to Judge that they had outside knowledge of certain matters relating to the case.
		Further police investigation required.
		Prejudicial evidence against injured party raised by Defence counsel during cross examination.
		Insufficient jurors available.
		Juror knew legal representatives.
Matter discussed in Chambers.		
2010	6	Defence application for further disclosure from Police Ombudsman.
		Matter discussed in Chambers.
		Prosecution witness discussing case outside court precincts.
		Further police investigation required as new evidence raised.
		Insufficient jurors available.
		Juror knew defence witness.

It is not possible to provide the total costs of these trials without an extensive manual exercise which would incur disproportionate cost.

Prisoners: Temporary Release

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice what procedures are in place for the temporary release of prisoners who have experienced a family bereavement.

(AQW 5197/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service's Compassionate Temporary Release (CTR) Scheme is operated under Rule 27 of The Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (NI) 1995, which allows for the Temporary Release of a prisoner for any special purpose, including for bereavement, subject to any conditions. Decisions on applications take full account of the European Convention on Human Rights Article 8 (Right to respect for private and family life). Applications can be considered in the case of the death or critical illness of a member of the prisoner's immediate family.

In the case of the death of a member of the prisoner's immediate family, a period of temporary release up to a maximum of 72 hours may be granted.

In some cases, prisoners granted escorted CTR under the scheme to visit terminally ill relatives, may be subsequently refused permission to attend the funeral of that relative on the grounds of risk to the escorting staff; risk to the prisoner; or risks relating to the nature or location of the funeral service and/or interment. In such cases, an application to have a graveside visit at a later date will be considered. Such graveside visits will be risk assessed and if risks are identified they may be reduced by scheduling the visit on a date and time of the Prison Service's choosing and without prior notice to the prisoner.

Prison Officers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of prison officers aged 60 years old and over who have not had regular medical examinations to establish their fitness for work.

(AQW 5198/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 92 officers over age 60. Regular medical examinations are not required for prison officers aged 60 years old and over.

Prison Officers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of prison officers aged 60 years old and over, broken down by age; and how many of these prison officers, in each age group, qualify for the enhanced pension and lump sum payment under the terms of the recently announced redundancy package.

(AQW 5199/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the 91 individuals aged 60 and over who are eligible for the staff exit package. None of these individuals qualify for pension enhancement under the terms of the redundancy package. They will however receive their pension and lump sum entitlement.

Age	Number of Eligible Staff
60	20
61	18
62	16
63	9
64	10
65+	18

DOJ: Spend in West Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Justice to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency since May 2010; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.

(AQW 5225/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice, and its arm's length bodies, do not record expenditure or planned expenditure in a way that can be allocated to a specific constituency, such as West Belfast.

However, the following areas of the Department have identified specific expenditure in West Belfast for 2011/12, (figures are rounded):

- the State Pathologist Department, based on the Royal Victoria Hospital site (£2,300,000);
- projects run by the Youth Justice Agency (£50,000);
- maintenance and operation of interface structures (£50,000);
- Probation Board office on the Andersonstown Road (£500,000); and
- Probation Board community development funding (£120,000).

Prison Service: Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff are currently suspended from duty as a result of the situation in the Prisoner Assessment Unit; and what are their job titles.

(AQW 5229/11-15)

Mr Ford: No prison service staff are currently suspended from duty as a result of the situation in the Prisoner Assessment Unit.

Maghaberry Prison: Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that the supporters of the Republican separated prisoners' protest have been quoted as glorifying the financial cost to the authorities of the protest, whether he will cut back on the expenditure on these prisoners, particularly when property is wilfully damaged.

(AQW 5230/11-15)

Mr Ford: The protest of 25-26 November will not impact on prisoner expenditure.

Maghaberry Prison: Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the cost of providing additional staff cover, security and repairing of the damage caused during the Republican separated prisoners' protest from 25 to 27 November 2011.

(AQW 5231/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated cost associated with the protest held outside Maghaberry Prison on 25 and 26 November is £217,911. This was a joint operation between Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Maghaberry Prison: Bowling Green

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4402/11-15, why cultivation work in preparation for a bowling green was carried out when authorisation for the green had not yet been given or a costing estimate sought.

(AQW 5232/11-15)

Mr Ford: Permission was given for cultivating the piece of ground as the work in question would have been necessary for any of the options being considered. The preparatory work was carried out by a prisoner work party, partially to provide additional outside vocational activity.

Access NI: Disclosures

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many times, in each year since the introduction of the scheme, have Access NI disclosures been successfully challenged and reissued; and (ii) in the case of an incorrect disclosure being discovered, whether a new disclosure is sent out with an acknowledgement of the mistake or an apology to the person concerned.

(AQW 5246/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) For the period 1 April 2009 – 31 October 2011 Access NI received 347,948 applications for disclosure. In 678 cases, Access NI has upheld disputes from applicants in respect of information contained within Disclosure Certificates and issued revised Certificates. The 678 cases can be categorised as follows:

	Number of disclosures processed	Total number of disputes upheld	Total number upheld against ANI	Total number upheld against Police Services
2009/10	146,885	298	217	81
2010/11	127,126	242	174	68
2011/12	73,937 (to end Oct 2011)	138	103	35

Information for 2008/09 is not available.

- (ii) A new disclosure certificate is issued with an acknowledgement of, and apology for, the error in respect of cases upheld against AccessNI (494 cases). Police Services are responsible for issuing letters in respect of any errors made specifically by them (184).

AccessNI has a number of systems to ensure that as far as possible the certificates that are issued are accurate. Staff receive appropriate training and this is refreshed at regular intervals. Work is checked on a random basis and any issues found are brought to the attention of staff.

Rural Crime: Definition

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has any plans to reconsider the definition of rural crime, given that urban crime is defined as Greater Belfast and rural crime is defined as the rest of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 5253/11-15)

Mr Ford: The definition of rural and urban crime is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Police Station: Dungiven, County Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice on how many occasions the Police Station at Dungiven, County Londonderry has been open to members of the public in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5338/11-15)

Mr Ford: This is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Homophobic Attacks: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of homophobic attacks in the Foyle area of G District in each year since 2007; and (ii) the number of convictions for such an offence.

(AQW 5366/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of homophobic motivated crimes recorded by the PSNI in the Foyle area of District G, for the financial years 2006/07 to 2010/11.

Recorded crime with a homophobic motivation for Foyle area of G District, 2006/07 to 2010/11.

Financial Year	Number of Homophobic Crimes Recorded
2006/07	7
2007/08	22
2008/09	8
2009/10	10
2010/11	16

It is not possible to provide conviction data on homophobic crime as conviction datasets do not distinguish homophobic offences from other violence against the person, property and other offences.

Attacks on Pensioners: Foyle Area of G District

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of attacks on pensioners in the Foyle area of G District in each year since 2007; and (ii) the number of convictions for such an offence.

(AQW 5367/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of violent crimes against persons aged 65+ as recorded by the PSNI in the Foyle area of District G, for the years 2007 to 2011.

Recorded Crime where the victim is aged 65+years, Foyle Policing Area

Year	Violent offences ¹
2007	26
2008	28
2009	38
2010	24
1st Jan-31st Oct 2011	23

Source: PSNI, Statistics Branch

1 Violent offences include violence against the person, sexual offences and robberies.

Please Note: Figures from 1st April 2011 are provisional and may be subject to change

It is not possible to provide conviction data on crimes against pensioners as conviction datasets do not hold information on victims and cannot distinguish them from other violence against the person and other offences.

Blackmail and Demanding Money with Menaces: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for (i) blackmail; and (ii) demanding money with menaces in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 5447/11-15)

Mr Ford: Blackmail offences may be prosecuted under Section 20 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.

The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for blackmail by court division 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim			
Ards	3		3
Armagh and South Down		1	
Belfast	6	7	10
Craigavon and Lisburn		2	1
Fermanagh and Tyrone			1
Londonderry			1
Total	9	10	16

Conviction datasets cannot distinguish the act of demanding money with menaces as it would be prosecuted under the offences of robbery or blackmail.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Prisons: Television

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) what is the current policy on the provision of a TV in prison cells, and whether this varies when a prisoner is on (a) an enhanced; (b) a standard; or (c) a basic regime; (ii) how this differs from the situation over the last five years; and (iii) if changes were made on the policy relating to TVs in cells, when, and why, this change took place.

(AQW 5452/11-15)

Mr Ford: With regard to televisions the current policy as detailed in the PREPS Corporate Framework published in June 2009 states: 'Prisoners on Standard and Enhanced regime level are eligible for access to in cell television. Access to televisions is a strong incentive to good behaviour and regime participation, and can aid good order and control by occupying prisoners' time and reducing boredom and tension. It also helps to maintain contact with the outside world and with current affairs.'

With regard to prisoners on the Basic regime the current PREPS Framework states: 'Prisoners on the Basic privilege level will not have access to an in cell television but will be allowed to have access to a radio or other suitable equipment.' In the past, Governors have occasionally exercised discretion granting a television to prisoners on basic regime, for example, at times when there were ongoing lockdowns with significantly reduced times out of cell.

At present there is an ongoing review of the PREPS Corporate Framework; an addendum was issued on 25 October 2011 in advance of publication, which provides Governors in charge with the discretion to provide televisions to prisoners on Basic Regime level. This has particular relevance to the management of Safer Custody issues, particularly for those prisoners who are identified as vulnerable.

Where prisoners choose to have a television in their cell they pay a rental fee out of their prisoner earnings. Prisoners may also purchase a television from a range of approved and specified models through the establishment's tuck shop.

Prior to the introduction of the PREPS Corporate Framework in June 2009, televisions were issued to prisoners in accordance with local arrangements for each prison establishment.

Prison Staff: Notices of Threat

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many notices of threat have been issued to staff in each prison in each of the last five years to date.

(AQW 5453/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the last 5 years Northern Ireland Prison Headquarters, has issued the following number of threat notices:

2011	34
2010	40
2009	11
2008	7
2007	4

Prisoners: Mobile Phones

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to outline the policy on prisoners having mobile phones.

(AQW 5455/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prisoners are not permitted to have or use mobile phones in prison other than in the following circumstances.

A mobile phone, belonging to a prisoner, may be held in the prisoner's property and accessed for use on pre-release home leave or on release as part of a pre-release scheme. Prisoners may also request the use a pre-programmed "restricted access" mobile phone or headset for the sole purpose of contacting the Samaritans. The headset or phone is withdrawn after use.

PSNI: Pay

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether the PSNI has delegated authority on pay.

(AQW 5484/11-15)

Mr Ford: Police officer pay is negotiated on a UK-wide basis.

The terms and conditions of police staff are in line with those of the NICS.

All changes to PSNI rates of pay are subject to the approval of the Minister for Finance and Personnel.

Department for Regional Development

Residents' Parking Schemes

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed residents' parking schemes. (AQW 4744/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has recently completed a reworking of the economic appraisal that was used to calculate the level of charge for the permit. Once the necessary approvals for the appraisal are received, work will recommence on a number of schemes already being considered. These are in the Lower Malone and Stranmillis Road Areas of Belfast, the Bogside area of Londonderry and the Massereene Street area of Antrim.

The resumption of work on these schemes will finalise the consultation with local residents and the individual scheme design which, in turn, will allow Roads Service to make the legislation required, to introduce such schemes.

DRD: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007. (AQW 4754/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the information requested in respect of public appointments made by Minister's for Regional Development since May 2007.

Public Body	Name	Position	Date Of Appointment
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr David Geoffrey Rodway	Member	06/08/2007
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Cllr David Hugh Browne	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Cllr Tom Hartley	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Noel Brady	Member	01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Peter Curistan	Member	01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Peter Dixon	Member	01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Ronald Moncrieff Foreman	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Alban Maginness	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Steven Pollard	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Samuel Ross Reed	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr David Geoffrey Rodway	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr David George Russell	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Ms Mary McMahon	Member	Reappointed 01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Dr Robert Trefor Campbell	Member	01/01/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Cllr James Patrick Convery	Member	22/07/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Cllr Daniel (Danny) Lavery	Member	22/07/2008
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Patrick (Cathal) Mullaghan	Member	22/07/2010
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mr Leonard (Len) John Patrick O'Hagan	Chairman	Reappointed 01/01/2011
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Mr Garvan Emmett O'Doherty	Chairman	Reappointed 08/02/2010
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Mr Robert (Roy) Gerard Devine	Member	Reappointed 08/02/2011
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Mr Joseph (Joe) McKeever	Member	Reappointed 08/02/2011

Public Body	Name	Position	Date Of Appointment
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Mr Peter Sheridan	Member	08/02/2011
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Ms Dolores O'Reilly	Member	08/02/2011
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Cllr Eliza McLaughlin	Member	17/10/2011
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Ald Maurice Devenney	Member	17/10/2011
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Ald Joe Millar	Member	17/10/2011
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Cllr William James Burns	Member	01/10/2007
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Cllr Michael James Ruane	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2007
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Kieran Campbell	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2007
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Gerard McGivern	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2007
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr James (Jim) Robert Stewart	Chairman	Reappointed 01/10/2007
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mrs Josephine O'Hare	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2007
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Seán Terence Hogan	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2008
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mrs Debonaire (Bonnie) Nora Needham Horsman	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2008
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Captain William (Bill) Luney	Member	Reappointed 01/10/2008
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Peter Desmond Fitzsimmons	Member	02/04/2010
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Brian Robert Reid	Member	01/10/2010
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Alan Bertram Stephens	Member	01/10/2010
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Cllr Michael Carr	Member	15/11/2010
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority	Mr Peter Desmond Fitzsimmons	Chairman	01/10/2011
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr John Doran	Member	Reappointed 01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr Sean Terence Hogan	Member	01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr Gerry Lennon	Member	Reappointed 01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr Samuel (John) Trethowan	Member	01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mrs Angela Philomena Coffey	Member	01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mrs Ruth Laird	Member	Reappointed 01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mrs Veronica Margaret Palmer	Chairman	Reappointed 01/07/2008
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr Samuel (John) Trethowan	Chairman	01/07/2011
NI Transport Holding Company	Mrs Angela Philomena Coffey	Member	Reappointed 01/07/2011
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr James Brown	Member	01/10/2011
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr Anthony Depledge	Member	01/10/2011
NI Transport Holding Company	Mr Francis (Frank) Anthony Hewitt	Member	01/10/2011
NI Transport Holding Company	Ms Sharon O'Connor	Member	01/10/2011
NI Water Ltd	Mr Declan Gormley	Member	08/07/2008
NI Water Ltd	Mr Donald (Don) Price	Member	08/07/2008

Public Body	Name	Position	Date Of Appointment
NI Water Ltd	Mr John Ballard	Member	Reappointed 01/04/2009
NI Water Ltd	Mr Chris Mellor	Chairman	Reappointed 01/04/2009
NI Water Ltd	Mrs Ruth Thompson	Member	Reappointed 01/04/2009
NI Water Ltd	Mr Peter Bunting	Member (Interim)	21/06/2010
NI Water Ltd	Mr Lawson McDonald	Member (Interim)	21/06/2010
NI Water Ltd	Mr Kevin Steele	Member (Interim)	21/06/2010
NI Water Ltd	Mr Máirtín Ó'Muilleoir	Member (Interim)	30/06/2010
NI Water Ltd	Mr Padraic White	Chairman (Interim)	09/08/2010
NI Water Ltd	Mr Sean Terence Hogan	Chairman	24/03/2011
NI Water Ltd	Mr Donald (Don) Price	Member	Reappointed 17/08/2011
NI Water Ltd	Mr John Rae	Member	17/08/2011
NI Water Ltd	Mr Deep Sagar	Member	17/08/2011
NI Water Ltd	Mr James (Jim) Robert Stewart	Member	17/08/2011
NI Water Ltd	Mr Kevin Steele	Member	17/08/2011

Roads: Developer Bonds

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development, with regard to The Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, (i) over the last five years, how many developers have had their bond invoked in order to ensure that road works within private estates were completed; (ii) how many requests Roads Service received from residents or companies during this period to invoke the bond of a developer; and (iii) to list the relevant housing estates.

(AQW 4776/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, over the last five years, 60 developers have had their bond invoked in order to ensure that road works within private estates were completed.

I am unable to provide information on how many requests Roads Service received from residents or companies during this period to invoke the bond of a developer, as this information is not held in a readily accessible format.

Regarding relevant housing estates, I can advise that these are detailed in the table below.

List of Developments

- Bramblewood, Crumlin;
- Bushford, Antrim;
- Millmount, Randalstown;
- Kirk Gardens, Clough;
- Galdanagh Drive, Clough;
- Regents Park, Larne;
- Forthill, Ballycarry;
- Lindara, Larne;
- Craigstown Meadows, Magheramore;
- Circular Road, Larne;
- The Brambles, Dervock;
- Moorfields, Ballybogey;
- Mill Cottages, Stranocum;
- Jubilee Court, Ballymoney;
- Agherton Hall, Portstewart;
- Knockbracken Drive, Coleraine;
- Glenara Woods, Castlerow;
- Hillmans Way, Coleraine;
- Ballywillan Crescent, Portrush;
- Sheperds Glen, Londonderry;
- Pine Trees, Londonderry;
- Upper Galliagh, Londonderry;
- Glenvale, Londonderry;
- Summer Meadows, Londonderry;
- Clarendon Manor, Londonderry;
- Willowbrook Park, Bangor;
- Gibsons Green, Bangor;
- Gobrana Lodge, Glenavy;
- Kestral Park, Bangor;
- Balmoral Square, Bangor;
- Mill Avenue/Wolfhill Manor, Belfast;
- Rodgers Bay, Carrickfergus;

- The Beeches, Hightown Road, Mallusk;
- Prospect Loanen, Carrickfergus;
- Laurel Hill, Ballycraigy Road, Newtownabbey;
- Ballysessy Close, Glenavy;
- Town Parks, Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus (2); Edenvale Avenue/Copeland Road, Carrickfergus;
- Edenmore Court, Whiteabbey;
- Bashfordlands, Carrickfergus;
- Westlands, Portavogie;
- White Church Meadows, Ballywalter;
- Rock Hill, Donaghadee;
- The Brambles, Stump Road, Ballywalter;
- Seaview Court, Portavogie;
- Sycamore Court, Drumaness;
- Malone Heights, Downpatrick;
- Hunters Mill, Downpatrick;
- Tyrella View, Downpatrick;
- The Demesne, Downpatrick;
- Bunsliebhe, Mullaghbawn;
- Knockdarragh, Fullerton Road, Newry;
- Grange Road, Kilkeel;
- Edenkennedy Way Armagh;
- Brookvale Armagh;
- Mount Pleasant Court Armagh;
- Mowhan Meadows Armagh;
- Riverview Court Banbridge;
- Steps Road, Craigavon;
- Bridgeford Meadows, Craigavon;
- Broomhill, Craigavon;
- Selshion Grove, Craigavon;
- Oakfields, Craigavon;
- Keelmount Grange, Craigavon;
- Silverwood Leaves, Craigavon.

Roads: Consultants

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of using external consultants on road projects in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4807/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's expenditure on the use of external consultants on roads projects in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below:

Financial Year	Expenditure £
2008-09	226,314
2009-10	140,860
2010-11	117,141

Salt and Grit Supplies

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it cost his Department to obtain the salt and grit supplies for this coming winter.

(AQW 4808/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service purchases grit and road salt through a competitive tender process. For reasons of commercial sensitivity and in the interests of securing best value for money in future competitions, I am unable to disclose the cost of obtaining salt and grit supplies for this coming winter.

A8: Upgrade

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of the 50 million euros from the Irish Government towards road improvements has been earmarked for the upgrade of the A8 road.

(AQW 4811/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you are aware, the A5 and A8 dual carriageway schemes have been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government. The Irish Government's funding commitment of £400 million was to have been paid to the Northern Ireland consolidated fund, based on progress against milestones on the A5, which had been agreed through the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). Funding for the projects was allocated to the Department through the normal budgetary process.

At the NSMC Plenary Meeting held on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of further funding by the Irish Government for progression of the A5 and A8 projects is being deferred and that, in this regard, the Irish Government will provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the project.

The relevant Departments will now prepare a new funding and implementation plan for the projects, for agreement at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMS Plenary meeting.

I would anticipate that the funding arrangements will remain as outlined above.

NI Water: Plumbing Inspections

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the plumbing inspections that are being carried out by NI Water in new housing developments and domestic connections.

(AQW 4812/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations (NI) 2009 are designed to protect consumers and the environment from poor water quality, unnecessary waste, misuse and the contamination of wholesome water supplies. All water systems must comply with the Regulations and can be subject to inspections. Water Regulation inspections, formerly known as Plumbing inspections, are carried out on a risk based approach determined by a property's water use and the potential risk of it contaminating the public water supply should any back flow or erroneous cross connections occur. There are five categories of risk from lowest to highest, and property types are allocated to a category based on national guidance. In line with the water companies in GB, NIW arranges water regulation inspections across all categories but places greater emphasis on the higher risk categories.

Domestic properties in new housing developments are normally classified in a low risk category and since January 2010 around 17% of all inspections were undertaken on this type of property to ensure that designers, developers, installers and owners of plumbing systems and fittings within properties comply with their legal obligations under the Regulations.

NIW publishes an annual return on its water regulations inspections, activities and findings in its Drinking Water Quality Report.

Water Contamination: Ballymoney

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the recent water contamination incident in Ballymoney, (i) what was the contaminant; (ii) how did the contamination occur; (iii) whether there was more than one incident of contamination and, if so, how many; (iv) why it took so long to resolve the matter; (v) what compensation is anticipated for affected consumers; and (vi) when last had the contaminated supply pipe been subjected to a sterilisation test witnessed by an inspector, and had been issued a certificate of approval by NI Water.

(AQW 4814/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a rigorous investigation was undertaken following the first indication of water quality problems in Ballymoney and (i) early indications are that soil and leaf material caused the contamination. (ii) Water main work was being undertaken in the area as part of the £90 million water main rehabilitation programme. During the course of the work a number of pipe connections had to be undertaken which coincided with very heavy rainfall and this may possibly have contributed to a small amount of excavated material entering the new water mains. (iii) There were no other water quality incidents in the Ballymoney area at the time. (iv) NIW must contact the Public Health Agency in all cases of water quality problems, and following discussions with them it was decided that, as a precautionary measure, customers in the area should be advised to boil water for drinking and cooking purposes. Water quality was monitored daily until two consecutive days of clear samples was achieved. The problem took longer than expected to resolve because of the length and complexity of the local water distribution system which extends to over 55 miles in a mainly rural area. (v) NIW does not anticipate that compensation will be payable for this incident. (vi) All new mains are sterilised by chlorine addition and flushed through following installation. Samples are lifted from each pipe to ensure that there are no contamination issues. This was the case during the Ballymoney incident and all new pipework was sterilised and sampled until it was satisfactory. When the new pipework was joined up with the existing pipework in the area, the contamination occurred, as described, and quality control check samples failed.

NI Water: Plumbing Inspections

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how many plumbing inspections for new housing developments, on supply pipes of less than 32mm diameter, have been carried out by NI Water in each NI Water region since 2007; and how this compares with the situation under the Water Service.

(AQW 4816/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that accurate electronic records of Water Regulation inspections (formerly known as plumbing inspections) are only available from January 2010, following the introduction of the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations (NI) 2009. Since then NIW has undertaken 165 inspections on supply pipes of less than 32 millimetre diameter in new housing developments.

Prior to this, no accurate records of inspection activity under former water fittings regulations were held by NIW or its predecessor Water Service, and NIW is therefore unable to provide the comparison requested.

NI Water: Pressure and Sterilisation Tests

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether pressure and sterilisation tests have been carried out and witnessed by an inspector on all supplies greater than 32mm in each NI Water region; (ii) how many certificates for approval have been issued by NI Water for supply pipes greater than 32mm by NI Water in each region since 2007; and (iii) for an assessment of how many connections have been made to the mains water supply in each region without these checks taking place.

(AQW 4818/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that since its establishment on 1 April 2007 (i) pressure and sterilisation tests have been carried out on two supply systems greater than 32 millimetre diameter. (ii) NIW has not issued certificates for any supply pipe connection. (iii) 312 connections for supplies greater than 32 millimetre diameter have been made to the public water supply system. It is the responsibility of customers to comply with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations (NI) 2009, which provides guidance and recommendations for flushing and/or disinfection of private supply pipes. NIW seeks to ensure the integrity of the public water supply by installing double check valves on each connection over 32 millimetre diameter.

Grange Road, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what works Roads Service (i) has carried out on; and (ii) has planned for, the Grange Road, Ballymena in 2011/12.

(AQW 4890/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

I can advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Regional Development Strategy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that Enniskillen has been identified as a Sub-Regional Centre in the Regional Development Strategy, to outline his Department's vision and plans for the town.

(AQW 4896/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Regional Development Strategy provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. The purpose of identifying key centres is to provide strategic guidance to the public and private sector, including local government, when developing their plans and policies. It is not a bidding document nor a fixed blueprint or master plan for any particular settlement.

When responsibility for the preparation of local development plans and development schemes transfers from DOE to local councils; these plans must 'take account' of the Regional Development Strategy.

DRD: Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 4898/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The cost of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years is provided below.

Year	Total Cost
2009 / 10	£ 2,258,143
2010 / 11	£ 2,093,327

The totals presented do not include overtime mileage, nor do they include mileage incurred by Roads Service industrial staff using their own vehicles. Overtime mileage and industrial staff mileage could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Reservoirs: Craigantlet, North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the future of the Craigantlet reservoirs in North Down.

(AQW 4900/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the sale of the Craigantlet Reservoirs has not yet been initiated and they have not been placed on the list of assets that NIW proposes to dispose of in 2011/12 or 2012/13.

Lyndhurst Gardens, North Belfast: Gritting

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will include Lyndhurst Gardens, North Belfast in the gritting schedule for this coming winter.

(AQW 4901/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: While my Department's Roads Service has no statutory obligation to salt roads, they do provide this service on the main traffic routes across Northern Ireland to assist the safe movement of traffic in wintry conditions. You will appreciate that it is simply not possible to salt all roads, given the many other demands placed on Roads Service's finite resources, much of them

safety related. Salting the busiest roads forms the basis of its current policy which ensures that its finite resources are utilised to best effect for the benefit of the majority of road users.

Roads Service applies a set of criteria to determine the suitability of a road for inclusion onto the salting schedule. Unfortunately, Lyndhurst Gardens does not meet these criteria as there are alternative routes, which are already treated, that can be used, however, I understand that two salt boxes have been provided for use, on a self-help basis, at this location.

A43: Traffic Calming

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the traffic calming problems on the A43 in the villages of Cargan and Martinstown, whether he will review the Roads Service Policy and Procedure Guide.

(AQW 4902/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that its policy in relation to traffic calming, is set out in 'Road Safety Engineering Procedures'. This policy aims to manage vehicle speeds and driver behaviour, in order to reduce collisions, especially those involving vulnerable road users. While traffic calming may involve a variety of features, use of vertical measures will not normally be considered for A class roads, unless they represent the only effective solution.

As the latest version of this policy, Version 4, was issued in November 2010, there are at present no plans to carry out a further review.

A43: Speed Limit

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would consider reducing the speed limit on the A43 between the villages of Cargan and Martinstown from 60mph to 50mph.

(AQW 4903/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that its policy in relation to traffic calming, is set out in 'Road Safety Engineering Procedures'. This policy aims to manage vehicle speeds and driver behaviour, in order to reduce collisions, especially those involving vulnerable road users. While traffic calming may involve a variety of features, use of vertical measures will not normally be considered for A class roads, unless they represent the only effective solution.

As the latest version of this policy, Version 4, was issued in November 2010, there are at present no plans to carry out a further review.

Railways: Belfast to Dublin Enterprise

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision has been made to replace engines and rolling stock on the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Service; and for an update on the Permanent Way Design Framework.

(AQW 4943/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advises rolling stock and locomotives used on the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise service are currently between 14 and 18 years of age. These would not ordinarily be scheduled for replacement for a further 10 to 15 years. Nevertheless NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann have been reviewing a number of strategies for service expansion and service enhancements ranging from rolling stock overhaul to supplementing and/or replacing with new rolling stock.

Provisions have been made for rolling stock overhauls within the current Corporate Plan and no further funding is proposed for fleet expansion or fleet replacement at this time.

Translink does not plan to renew the Permanent Way Framework until 2012/13.

However, as part of the tendering process for the Coleraine - Londonderry Track Renewals project, Translink will have procured all major Permanent Way design requirements for the immediate future.

Any minor design works required before the new Framework is in place can be accommodated with 'in house' resources.

M1: Bus Lane

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4235/11-15, to list the 73 daily services that are using the bus lane on the M1 motorway.

(AQW 4964/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The 73 daily Translink Services using the dedicated bus lane on the M1 motorway are as follows:

Between 07:30 and 09:30, Monday to Friday:

Service	Number of services per day
200/X2/BE001	3
238/238A	7
250/251	4

Service	Number of services per day
261/261B	5
273	4
650	6
651	6
10X	3
Totals	38

Between 15:00 and 18:30, Monday to Friday:

Service	Number of services per day
200/X2/BE001	6
238/238A	6
250/251	3
261/261B	4
270	1
273	4
650	4
651	7
Totals	35

The hours quoted are the operational times for the bus lane.

Grit from Depots

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether members of the public will be able to obtain grit from his Department's depots if there are heavy snowfalls in the coming winter.

(AQW 4971/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has considered allowing members of the public to obtain grit from Roads Service depots during heavy snowfalls. However, after careful deliberation it concluded that this would be unwise, mainly due to health and safety implications. I am sure you will appreciate that during the winter period, depots are very busy places with large gritters and loading shovels manoeuvring and reversing.

Nevertheless, Roads Service does provide and maintain approximately 4,200 salt bins and over 40,000 grit piles, where they are needed. These are provided for public use, on a self help basis.

Railways: Belfast to Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the annual cost of maintaining the Belfast to Bangor train line.

(AQW 4972/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advises maintenance costs for the Belfast to Bangor railway service over the last 3 years are detailed in the following table:

	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Track, signalling and station maintenance costs	230	188	253

The Belfast to Bangor railway service is part of a through service operating from Bangor - Belfast - Lisburn - Portadown and return and is operated by the Class 3000 fleet. There are 23 trains in the Class 3000 fleet of which 21 are available for service in any given day. The Class 3000 fleet operates throughout the NIR network and individual trains are not allocated to specific services. The through service Bangor-Belfast-Lisburn-Portadown is operated by 15 trains.

As individual trains are not allocated to specific services, it is not possible to provide details of fleet maintenance for the Belfast to Bangor service. However the cost of maintaining the entire Class 3000 fleet in the last 3 years was:

	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Class 3000 fleet maintenance costs	3,845	4,242	4,880

Railways: Bangor to Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has any plans to create a stop on the Bangor to Belfast train line at Ikea, Holywood Exchange.

(AQW 4973/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink do not have provision within their current Capital Plan to create a stop on the Bangor to Belfast train line at Ikea, Holywood Exchange. There are no current plans for such a halt to be developed within existing budgets as agreed at Executive level. Translink update capital plans on a regular basis and this is discussed with my Department regularly.

Incinerators: Duncrue Street, Belfast

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what inspections are carried out on the sludge disposal incinerators in Duncrue Street, Belfast to ensure that there is a competent maintenance and investment scheme in place.

(AQW 4994/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the incinerators in Duncrue Street are owned and operated by a private sector operator, providing a service to NIW through a Public Private Partnership contract. The operator is contracted to adopt an industry standard approach to managing and operating these facilities. This involves establishing and maintaining a comprehensive asset register and a comparable asset investment programme for the lifetime of each asset.

The investment programme is updated on an annual basis, driven by the output of condition surveys on each asset. The contractor's planned maintenance management systems are driven by the same processes, along with information from the supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system which also prompts planned and reactive maintenance.

The operator is commercially incentivised to maintain the assets in order to perform to both the stringent regulatory standards and the contract standards. As a minimum, NIW is also provided with the annual oversight of reviewing the contractor's asset register, asset management plans and investment programme. Problems that have limited reliable full incineration until September 2011 have evolved from inheriting legacy assets and different management systems from NIW, concurrent with the technical difficulties of bringing on line a complex new build incinerator.

Clearing of Ice and Snow from Footpaths

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the councils which have reached an agreement with the Roads Service on the clearing of ice and snow from footpaths in the coming winter.

(AQW 5002/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, to date, only five of the councils have actually reached an agreement with Roads Service on the clearing of ice and snow from footpath in the coming winter. These are:-

- Ballymena.
- Limavady.
- Belfast City.
- Lisburn.
- Carrickfergus.

However, five of the six councils in the Greater Belfast area, covering almost 40% of the population, have already either signed up to the original agreement or have indicated that they are likely to sign up to the new agreement.

In other areas, 10 Councils have either signed up to the original agreement or have indicated that they are likely to sign up to the new agreement with three other councils still considering their position.

Only eight Councils have indicated that they are unlikely to sign up at this stage but it is hoped that these can be brought on board in due course.

I am disappointed that more Councils have not signed up to date, given the events of last winter, as I believe this approach offers Roads Service and local government the opportunity to demonstrate a joined-up response in providing this valuable service to local ratepayers.

Key Transport Corridors: Journey Times

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the journey times on the key transport corridors in 2003.

(AQW 5022/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-2012, a daughter document of the Regional Development Strategy, identified five Key Transport Corridors in Northern Ireland. Roads Service has commissioned studies, the purpose of which was to monitor the network and assess the journey time reliability on Northern Ireland's motorways and trunk road network. The average journey times in 2003, in both directions, for the am peak period on these corridors are shown in the table below:

Key Transport Corridor	Description	Average Time in 2003 (hours:mins)
KTC 1	Eastern Seaboard Corridor (Larne to Newry)	1:35
	Eastern Seaboard Corridor (Newry to Larne)	1:33
KTC 2	Belfast – Londonderry Corridor	1:37
	Londonderry – Belfast Corridor	1:41
KTC 3	Northern Corridor – (Moira to Londonderry)	1:54
	Northern Corridor – (Londonderry to Moira)	2:03
KTC 4	Western Corridor – (Londonderry to Aughnacloy)	1:25
	Western Corridor – (Aughnacloy to Londonderry)	1:33
KTC 5	South Western Corridor – (Belfast to Enniskillen)	2:05
	South Western Corridor – (Enniskillen to Belfast)	2:05

Sustainable Travel

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of how the £500m investment to promote sustainable modes of travel will be spent.

(AQW 5048/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Over the budget period 2011/12 to 2014/15 Capital Investment of £174m (this includes an additional £22m towards the Coleraine to Londonderry track relay) has been allocated for projects to improve the railways network with £17.6m allocated to bus related projects.

These projects include:

- The procurement of 20 new trains. A new train care facility is being built at Adelaide, Belfast and some of the platforms on the railways network are being extended to allow the trains to operate and deal with the expected increase in demand. The total cost of these projects over this budget period is £76m.
- The Coleraine to Londonderry Re-lay project has been brought forward to start in July 2012 and will be completed in three phases. The first two phases, costing in total £46m, will be funded during the budget period up to 2015.
- Other projects being taken forward include the redevelopment of Portadown Rail Station, refurbishment of Antrim Integrated Bus and Rail Station and other railway safety related projects.
- The bus capital will allow for the purchase of more buses to replace some of the older buses still in operation and improvements to the bus workshops and garages to ensure the buses are adequately maintained.
- The capital budget also includes small sums of seed funding for sustainable transport initiatives such as electric cars infrastructure.

The figure also includes in excess of £318m revenue funding which has been allocated for a range of public transport grants and subsidies over the budget period 2011/12 to 2014/15. This budget figure is for Public Transport only and excludes Ports. It is made up as follows:

- The largest single grant is for reimbursement of the concessionary fares scheme for senior citizens, school children and other specified groups. This accounts for over £125m over the budget period. Concessionary fares are an important part of the funding for Translink and the small Transport operators.
- The largest subsidy is Public Service Obligation or deficit funding for the Northern Ireland Railways network which is over £96m over the budget period.
- Fuel Duty Rebate or rebate on the duty paid on fuel for operating a stage carriage network of services is the next largest annual subsidy at around £43m for Translink and other bus operators.
- The fourth largest group of grants are those relating to delivery of transport services for people with disabilities and these will account for around £33.5m over the budget period.
- The remaining £20m plus revenue subsidies and grants relate to a wide range of transport services including Park and Ride Schemes, Public Transport Reform, Travelwise initiative and support for Translink pension costs.

Some of the public transport grants, notably concessionary fares, are paid on the basis of actual journeys so the actual expenditure may vary from the provision if in year funding is provided.

Speed Limit: England and Wales

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Department of Transport regarding its proposal to raise the speed limit in England and Wales.

(AQW 5073/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department for Transport's proposal to increase speed limits on motorways to 80 mph will be subject to public consultation and, as originally proposed would only apply to motorways and high class dual carriageways in England and Wales.

It is now understood that the consultation on raising speed limits will only apply to certain motorway routes and is no longer proposed for dual carriageways and two lane motorways.

In Northern Ireland, my Department has powers to set speed limits under Article 38 of Part IV of The Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and my Department's Roads Service has advised that while it has had no direct discussions with the Department for Transport, its officials are being kept informed of the proposals for England and Wales.

Railways: Halt at City of Derry Airport

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has completed a feasibility study, in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, of the need for a railway halt at the City of Derry Airport in preparation for the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 5079/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department continues to support preparations for the City of Culture 2013 in Londonderry. To date my Department or Arm's Length Bodies have not undertaken nor been involved in any discussions in relation to a feasibility study on the need for a railway halt at the City of Derry Airport. A feasibility study was undertaken in 2006 into the potential to provide a rail service to Belfast International Airport. That study concluded that such a link would only become economically viable if passenger numbers using the airport were to double from existing levels to approximately 10 million per annum. During 2010 approximately 338,000 passengers used City of Derry Airport. In that context I have no plans to carry out a feasibility study on the need for a rail halt, however, I will keep this area under review.

Water Hydrants

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the responsibility his Department has for the maintenance of water hydrants.

(AQW 5086/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no responsibility for the maintenance of fire hydrants. However, Northern Ireland Water has responsibility under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to keep every fire hydrant fixed on any of its water mains or other pipes in good working order and, for that purpose, to replace any such hydrant when necessary.

Water Hydrants

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the response time from receiving a complaint about a problem with a water hydrant to the hydrant being repaired.

(AQW 5087/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it aims to carry out emergency repairs within two working days and non-emergency repairs within thirty working days. These response times have been agreed with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

Water Hydrants

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current backlog of work to be carried out on water hydrants.

(AQW 5088/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there is no backlog of work to be carried out on water hydrants.

Door-2-Door Transport Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will continue to provide funding for the Door-2-Door transport scheme, given that it provides a vital service to people with disabilities.

(AQW 5094/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Funding for the Door-2-Door scheme for all four years of the current budget cycle was secured and protected in the most recent spending review. Thus there is funding for the scheme in place to 2014/15.

As you may be aware there is an ongoing legal case around the awarding of the new contracts for this scheme. The scheme, however, continues to operate as normal.

Translink: Passes

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4291/11-15, how many journeys have been recorded on the passes of spouses, partners and dependants of Translink employees in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5098/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has informed me that the number of journeys recorded in each of the last three years against the Translink Employee Concessionary Travel Scheme for spouses, partners and dependent children up to 16 years is set out in the table below. This represents some 0.2% of total Translink passenger journeys.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Spouse/Partner Uses	143,970	147,639	142,981
Dependant Uses	12,494	14,458	13,478
Total	156,464	162,097	156,459

The information collected by Translink records the journey as a "staff pass" and states the limit of travel but does not stipulate the actual extent of the individual journey or the subsequent costs attached to it. In 2010/11 this represented approximately 0.2% of total Translink passenger journeys.

There are 5 important considerations in relation to the Scheme. First, such travel concessions are common practice in the transport sector across the UK and Ireland. Second, these types of passes were introduced as a result of pay negotiations, when staff sacrificed a higher pay increase in favour of the concession scheme. Third, the Scheme operates at minimal cost to Translink. Fourth the information collected by Translink does not record the details of individual journeys so costs cannot be easily assigned to journeys.

Fifth, it cannot be assumed that the journeys recorded would all translate into fare-paying journeys in the absence of the Scheme.

Translink: Employees

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people are employed by Translink.
(AQW 5099/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advises the total number of employees as of 23 October 2011 is 3,905.

This may be broken down by subsidiary company as:

- Ulsterbus 2,257
- NI Railways 903
- Metro 745

Translink: Journey Cost

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the average cost of a single journey on a Translink service last year.
(AQW 5100/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advises the average fare per journey for 2010/11 on Translink services was £2.04. This represents an average of Ulsterbus/Metro/NIR all ways single journeys.

The figure excludes school pupils' journeys as these represent a contracted sum and are not fares as such.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the relationship between his Department and the Department for Social Development on working together in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.
(AQW 5106/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials from my Department cooperate with the Department for Social Development in relation to work in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

DSD has also been provided with the relevant contact details for both Roads Service Section Engineers and Translink Divisional Managers for each Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership. Roads Service and Translink staff can attend meetings of Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships when requested to resolve local issues.

I support this approach and believe it offers advantages to both Departments and the residents of these areas.

Water Supply: Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department has taken as a result of the recent disruption to the water supply in Ballymoney.
(AQW 5144/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a rigorous investigation was undertaken following the first indication of water quality problems in the Ballymoney area and a comprehensive action plan was implemented to restore water quality to its normal high standard. Investigations centred on recent water main work in the area being undertaken as part of the £90 million water main rehabilitation programme. During the course of the work a number of pipe connections had to be undertaken which coincided with very heavy rainfall which may possibly have contributed to a small amount of excavated material entering the new water mains. Water quality testing is carried out routinely after rehabilitation work and there were indications that the water quality may have been affected by the excavated material. NIW must contact the Public Health Agency in all cases of water quality problems, and following discussions with them it was decided that, as a precautionary measure, customers in the

area should be advised to boil water for drinking and cooking purposes. The action plan to restore the water quality in Ballymoney was successful and the boil water notice has now been removed for all customers in the area.

There is a well defined approach to work on the water main system taking into account stringent health and safety standards and water quality testing. The water main rehabilitation programme has been operating for two years with many hundreds of kilometres of new water mains laid, and it is very rare that water quality problems arise following the work.

Water Supply: Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what compensation is available from his Department following the recent disruption to the water supply in Ballymoney.

(AQW 5145/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that while the precaution of boiling water before consumption (for food preparation, cooking and drinking) was both inconvenient and regrettable, the water supply was maintained to all properties and could be used for washing and sanitary purposes in the normal manner. The company liaised with the Public Health Agency and Ballymoney Borough Council and advised all customers in the area accordingly. There is no Departmental or NIW compensation scheme for disruption to water supplies.

Railways: New Routes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has any plans to introduce new train routes.

(AQW 5177/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My priority within the budget, as agreed at Executive level, is to maintain, and where appropriate, upgrade the existing railways network. Beyond the current budget period, there will be a continuing requirement to fund projects to maintain safety and reliability on the existing network. I have no plans to introduce new train routes.

Water Charges: Businesses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue has been raised from water charges for businesses in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 5179/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that its charging system does not identify Business customers as a separate category. The non-domestic category includes small, medium and large businesses; industrial users; farms; voluntary organisations; charities; public bodies and places of worship; as well as any property not intended for permanent household use.

The revenue raised from water charges for non-domestic properties in each of the last two financial years was £40 million in 2009/10 and £41 million in 2010/11.

Roads: Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Roads Service about the provision of a link road from Lisburn to the Maze/Long Kesh site, in preparation for the development of this site.

(AQW 5188/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that a Programme Delivery Unit has been established by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to develop proposals for the Maze site. A small section of the Knockmore Link road is required by the Maze regeneration site to help facilitate its development. The Programme Delivery Unit is currently considering options for access as part of a review of overall plans for the site. These options will be subject to scheme development and planning approval and the promoter of the site will be expected to provide the road infrastructure.

Roads Service will provide assistance to the Programme Delivery Unit in the development of these proposals.

Grit Boxes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many additional grit boxes have been provided this winter compared with last winter, for motorists and residents at housing estate entrances and on minor roads.

(AQW 5201/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, since the start of last winter, it has provided an additional 436 grit/salt boxes at various locations throughout Northern Ireland.

Public Transport: Language Signage

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, when assessing the need to put additional language signage on public transportation, particularly buses, what consideration is given to the safety of staff and passengers in areas where the new signage may be viewed as unwelcome.

(AQW 5202/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has informed me that, in considering proposals to introduce additional language signage, any safety risks to staff and passengers are included among the assessments that are carried out. Consultation with trade unions and other key stakeholders is normally involved as part of the process.

Parking Fines: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the income generated from parking fines in each car park in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5238/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain an analysis of income from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) on a constituency or regional basis. Details of PCN income for all of Northern Ireland since Decriminalised Parking Enforcement was introduced in October 2006 is provided in the table below:

Year	Income From PCNs
2006/07	£2M
2007/08	£6M
2008/09	£5.2M
2009/10	£4.8M
2010/11	£4.5M

Roads Service has also advised that approximately 3.8% of the PCNs issued since October 2006 have been issued in Bangor and Holywood.

All revenue generated by the payment of PCNs, along with income from car-parking and other charges, is used to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government.

Parking Fines: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the parking income generated by each car park in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I advised the Member in my answer to his Assembly Question, AQW 5238/11-15, Decriminalised Parking Enforcement was introduced in Northern Ireland in October 2006. Since then, income from Roads Service's charged car-parks in Bangor and Holywood has been as follows:-

Bangor

Car-Park	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
Abbey St. East	£61,183	£60,782	£59,790	£61,019	£55,236
Bingham Lane	£57,704	£59,257	£59,013	£59,482	£56,927
Castle Street	£43,890	£41,992	£40,935	£47,133	£43,459
Clifton Road	£12,834	£12,359	£12,710	£14,137	£8,628
Holborn Ave.	£38,303	£43,679	£45,078	£46,901	£41,777
Mills Road	£24,351	£24,990	£25,466	£27,949	£24,542
The Vennel	£33,937	£29,614	£32,898	£30,912	£34,350

Holywood

Car-Park	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
Church Road	£57,256	£61,547	£61,955	£72,320	£78,875
Hibernia St Nth.	£57,585	£59,447	£53,344	£61,097	£48,135
Hibernia St Sth.	£23,735	£17,984	£24,044	£23,694	£26,815

All revenue generated by the payment of parking charges, along with income from Penalty Charge Notices and other charges, is used to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government.

Railways: Larne Line

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Translink will introduce additional services to Great Victoria Street station from the Larne railway line.

(AQW 5258/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advises that at present the majority of Larne line trains terminate in Central Station. Following the delivery of New Trains (Class 4000) during 2011/12, Translink proposes to introduce a revised timetable from circa mid-2012. The details of this timetable are currently being worked up to enable further discussion with the Translink Board and my department.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Noise Envelope

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the proposal of 'noise envelopes' around airports; and whether he has considered such a scheme for the area around Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 5397/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The concept of a "noise envelope" for larger airports was put forward by the Department for Transport for comment in its scoping document for developing a sustainable framework for United Kingdom aviation due to be published for consultation early next year. In my response to the scoping document I said that I will be interested to see if it provides a practical way forward in balancing the economic and local environment impacts of airports such as George Best Belfast City Airport.

Adopted Pumping Stations: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development which pumping stations in the North Down constituency have been adopted in the last (i) twelve months; (ii) three years; and (iii) five years.

(AQW 5443/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that three pumping stations have been adopted in the North Down constituency in the past five years. These are The Coaches, Browns Brae, Holywood on 30 April 2008; Lord Wardens Wood, Rathgael Road, Bangor on 30 April 2008; and Shaftesbury Road, Bangor on 30 November 2008.

Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.

(AQW 5534/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The DRD Press Office employs five staff at a cost of Salaries - £204,031 for the 2010/2011 financial year.

DRD: Programme for Government

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the implications of the draft Programme for Government for his Department.

(AQO 919/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the publication of the draft Programme for Government.

The key commitments of my Department include:

- progressing the upgrade of key road projects and improving the overall road network to reduce journey times;
- investing over £600 million in water and sewerage infrastructure to maintain a high quality of drinking water and improve compliance with waste water standards; and
- investing over £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of travel including the upgrade of the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line and creating the conditions to allow more primary school pupils to walk or cycle to school.

Roads: North Antrim

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development how many claims were made against his Department, because of accidents resulting from uneven roads surfaces in the North Antrim area in each of the last three years, and how much compensation was paid as a result of these claims.

(AQO 921/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not record information on claims for compensation on a constituency area basis.

However collectively, the Ballymoney and Moyle, and the Ballymena and Larne Roads Service Section Office areas cover the constituencies of North Antrim and a portion of East Antrim.

In 2010/11, 107 claims were received as a result of uneven road surfaces in this combined area and £7,412 compensation was paid.

In 2009/10, claims totalled 191, and £25,105 compensation was paid.

In 2008/2009, 175 claims were received, and £13,790 compensation was paid.

A26: Coleraine to Belfast

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his immediate plans for the maintenance or upgrade of the A26 road between Coleraine and Belfast.

(AQO 923/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you are aware, at the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary Meeting held on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of more funding by the Irish Government for progression of the A5 and A8 projects is being deferred and that, in this regard, the Irish Government will provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards this project.

The relevant Departments are now preparing a new funding and implementation plan for the projects, for agreement at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

This process will undoubtedly affect the funding available to Roads Service. When the funding is confirmed, I will review the spending priorities across the Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme. This will include the progression of schemes such as dualling of the A26 from Glarryford (at the end of the existing dual carriageway) to the A44, Ballycastle Fork and a further proposal to dual the A26 between Ballymoney (at the Portrush Roundabout) and Coleraine (at Windyhall).

In the meantime, development work on the Glarryford scheme will press ahead, with the aim of publishing the draft Orders and an Environmental Statement in 2012. The earliest possible start date for this scheme, assuming satisfactory progression through statutory procedures, the procurement process and the availability of finance, would be in the 2014/15 financial year.

With regard to maintenance, Roads Service has advised that a £170,000 Trunk Route carriageway resurfacing scheme was completed on the A26 Newbridge Road, Coleraine, in September 2011. A further £240,000 carriageway resurfacing scheme will be completed on the A26 Frosses Road, Ballymoney during this financial year.

Additional bids for funding to allow resurfacing to be undertaken on this route will be made, but these schemes will have to compete with others on Trunk Routes for the limited funding, which will be allocated on a priority basis.

A2: Belfast to Bangor

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any proposals to upgrade the A2 Belfast to Bangor dual carriageway within the next four years.

(AQO 924/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, the A5 and A8 dual carriageway schemes have been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

At the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary Meeting held on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of further funding by the Irish Government, for progression of the A5 and A8 projects, is being deferred and that, in this regard, the Irish Government will provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the project.

The relevant Departments are now preparing a new funding and implementation plan for the projects, for agreement at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

This process will undoubtedly affect the funding available to Roads Service. When the funding is confirmed, I will review the spending priorities across the Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

Included in this review will be a proposed scheme to widen the A2 Sydenham Bypass to three lanes in each direction. This project is unlikely to commence within the current budget period but is progressing towards Statutory Orders. Further advancement will be determined by the funding received in the subsequent budget period.

Green-schools Travel Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to introduce the Green-Schools Travel programme, which is operating in 43 countries worldwide.

(AQO 925/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Green-Schools programme is part of an international Eco-Schools programme and fifty two countries are now signed up. It is called Eco-Schools in the UK (including Northern Ireland) and the Green Schools initiative in the Republic of Ireland. It deals with wider environmental issues than just the issue of travel to school – there are nine topics in total.

The programme is delivered by TIDY Northern Ireland, which is an environmental charity financed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. My Department is a delivery partner to the Eco-Schools Programme through the travel / transport topic.

One of the ways in which my Department works with schools is in the delivery of the Safer Routes to School initiative. Since 2005 we have delivered Safer Routes to School to over 200 schools in Northern Ireland – including nine schools in the West Belfast constituency.

Snow Clearing

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the cooperation between Roads Service and local councils in relation to responsibilities for clearing snow from streets.

(AQO 926/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I met with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) on this issue in June. This was followed up by my Department's Roads Service, who held a series of meetings with NILGA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives representatives throughout the summer. The aim of these meetings was to establish a consensus on a number of points of principle that could be used as a basis for negotiations between Roads Service and the councils, for the removal of snow and ice from busy town centre footways, during prolonged periods of wintry weather.

It was the intention that these points would form the basis of a draft agreement which, could be amended at local level, to take account of local council preferences, relating to specific schedules of footways, call-out arrangements, or salt delivery arrangements.

Roads Service has now approached all councils with a view to developing local agreements that can take account of local council preferences. This is on the basis of Roads Service providing free salt, our normal indemnity, some of our staff, where possible, and our expertise in relation to the timing of salting operations.

I am advised that discussions are ongoing and that, to date, the reaction from councils is as follows:

- Five of the six councils in the Greater Belfast area (covering almost two-fifths of the population) have already either signed up to the original agreement, or have indicated that they are likely to sign up to the new agreement.
- Outside the Greater Belfast area, a further 10 Councils have either signed up to the original agreement, or have indicated that they are likely to sign up to the new agreement with 3 other councils still considering their position.
- Only 8 Councils have indicated that they are unlikely to sign up at this stage but it is hoped that they can be brought on board in due course.

I am disappointed that not all Councils have signed up to date, given the events of last winter, as I believe this approach offers Roads Service and local government the opportunity to demonstrate a joined-up response in providing this valuable service to local ratepayers. I would therefore like to make a further appeal to the remaining councils, to sign the agreement with Roads Service.

Glen Road, Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the volume of traffic using the Glen Road in west Belfast, and if more lay-bys can be created to allow traffic to flow more freely.

(AQO 927/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service carried out a traffic count on the Glen Road in West Belfast from 7 to 13 April 2011. Analysis of this traffic count shows that the average daily traffic volume for this period was 17,822.

As with many other routes in the Greater Belfast area, Glen Road is busy during the morning and afternoon peak periods. Traffic congestion was evident at school starting and finishing times, due to the number of schools in the vicinity.

Roads Service considers that, in view of the overall traffic volumes on Glen Road at these times, it is unlikely that the provision of parking lay-bys would significantly improve traffic flow or reduce congestion.

Department for Social Development

Disability Living Allowance: Appeals

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Disability Living Allowance appeals held in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3774/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The number of Disability Living Allowance appeals held in each of the last three years is set out below:

Financial Year	Total Appeals Held
2008-09	8,185
2009-10	7,348
2010-11	6,715

Insulating and Energy Efficiency Schemes

Ms Lewis asked the Minister for Social Development what schemes are available to assist people in insulating their homes and ensuring energy efficiencies.

(AQW 4287/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department's primary tool in tackling fuel poverty and improving household energy efficiency is the Warm Homes Scheme. This scheme offers a range of insulating and heating measures to owner occupiers and privately rented households who receive a qualifying benefit. The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme also offers assistance to other owner occupiers and privately rented households who do not qualify for the Warm Homes Scheme. In addition, the Housing Executive administers an annual Heating Replacement Scheme for their tenants. The draft Programme for Government includes a commitment that by March 2012 the Housing Executive will also bring forward a strategy to improve the thermal efficiency of its housing stock including a programme aimed at providing full double glazing by 2014/15. A range of other energy efficiency improvement schemes are available and are funded through the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP). The Energy Savings Trust, freephone number 0800 512 012, can advise on grant availability in Northern Ireland.

Illegally Dumped Tyres

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many times tyres have been illegally dumped on Housing Executive property in each of the last five years, broken down by Housing Executive District Office area.

(AQW 4495/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not specifically record when tyres are illegally dumped on its land.

Appeals

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) target; and (ii) average timescale from a submission of an appeal to his Department until an Appeals Service hearing for (i) Employment Support Allowance; (ii) Disability Living Allowance; (iii) Incapacity Benefit; and (iv) Income Support.

(AQW 4589/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are separate appeals handling targets and means of measurement in the Social Security Agency and The Appeals Service. The Agency's targets for processing appeals are called average actual clearance times, which measure the average number of working days taken to process a benefit appeal from the date of receipt in the Agency until the submission is forwarded to The Appeals Service. The Appeals Service has processing targets from date of receipt of the submission until date of first hearing for each appeal type. The respective targets and current performance against each of them in the current financial year are detailed in the table below:

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY TARGETS (AVERAGE ACTUAL CLEARANCE TIMES)

	Target (days)	Performance Year To Date @ 30 September 2011 (days)
Employment Support Allowance	45	46.7
Disability Living Allowance	35	31.9
Income Support	40	24.1
Incapacity Benefits	40	24.1

THE APPEALS SERVICE TARGETS FOR FIRST HEARING DATE & PERFORMANCE

	Target (weeks)	Performance Year To Date @ 30 September 2011 (weeks)
Employment Support Allowance	8	9.2
Disability Living Allowance	9	11.2
Income Support	8	9.8
Incapacity Benefits	8	7.7

Rehousing: Vulnerable People

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to help with the rehousing of people with learning difficulties or mental health problems.

(AQW 4672/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The resettlement of people with a learning disability back into more appropriate community based housing is a key priority for DHSSPS as well as my Department.

During this Comprehensive Spending Review, £93.93m capital and £34.2m Supporting People revenue funding has been ring fenced to provide supported housing within the community for 850 vulnerable people including those with a learning disability who need to be resettled from long stay hospitals back into the community.

However I have recently become aware that issues in the commissioning of these new units is impeding delivery and the potential for an under spend of these ring fenced resources now exists. This is unacceptable and I will not accept it. Moving some of the most vulnerable in our society out of institutions into the community in supported housing is key to helping individuals and giving them a better quality of life in society. I have tasked officials to immediately establish a task force to get these much needed housing projects developed and delivered as soon as possible.

Derelict Buildings and Incomplete Brownfield Sites

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of derelict buildings and incomplete brownfield sites which have become eyesores and which could potentially become (i) areas for fly-tipping; or (ii) adventure playgrounds for children.

(AQW 4732/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is aware of the potential hazards presented by derelict buildings and incomplete brownfield sites. We are working closely with other organisations such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive who are also taking forward work on empty homes in order to both reduce the consequences of blight and increase housing supply particularly in the private sector, local councils and the respective property owners to ensure all steps are taken to minimise such risks. My Department's Development Offices monitor the situation in this respect very closely and are proactive in introducing appropriate barriers to deter any such activity. However, it should be borne in mind that fly tipping is an issue which is dealt with at a local council level.

Benefit Appeal Tribunals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the process for selecting panel members for benefit appeal tribunals; and who is responsible for authorising the members' payments and expenses.

(AQW 4756/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The President of Appeal Tribunals has statutory responsibility for the selection of tribunal members. He delegates this responsibility to the Appeals Service which selects panels in accordance with his directions. Tribunal members are required to undertake a minimum number of sessions and attend regular training. As they are appointed on a part-time fee paid basis, selection after initial appointment is based on training in the relevant benefit, the member's availability, and travel considerations. The Appeals Service is responsible for authorising the payment of fees and expenses for panel members.

Double Glazing: North Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in the North Antrim constituency might benefit from the installation of double glazing as a result of the Draft Programme for Government, broken down by (i) council area; and (ii) ward.

(AQW 4777/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

There are currently two schemes, totalling 331 dwellings, due to start within the next quarter in the Housing Executive's Ballymoney District Office area that will have window replacement included in the planned works. Additionally, a scheme with 22 dwellings has been identified for window replacement in the same area and a further two schemes, totalling 265 dwellings in the Ballymena District Office area will also have window replacement included in the planned works. These schemes are expected to start within the next nine months.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Draft Programme for Government and the commitment to install double glazing windows in Housing Executive homes (i) to detail any attempts that have been made to identify key Housing Executive stock in the Newtownabbey District Council area that are fitted with single glazing windows; and to provide a breakdown of any information collected; and (ii) to detail the level of funds allocated to the Housing Executive to fit double glazing windows to properties in the Newtownabbey District Council area.

(AQW 4780/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the Draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

I can advise however that three External Cyclical Maintenance schemes are due to commence this financial year in the Newtownabbey area at an estimated cost of £2.3m and where necessary these schemes will include window replacement.

Affordable Housing

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Westminster in relation to the financial investment package for affordable housing announced on 21 November 2011; and whether the provisions of such a package will be extended to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 4851/11-15)

Mr McCausland: We are not, as yet, aware of any Barnett consequential arising out of the Coalition Government's publication, 'Laying Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England'.

I recognise the difficulties facing those seeking an affordable home. That is why I have committed to investing at least £103.25 million in affordable housing between 2011/12 and 2014/15. Investment in Co-Ownership Housing will total over £28 million this year enabling up to 700 affordable homes to be purchased.

My Department is developing a new Housing Strategy which will outline my priorities for investment in housing. I will consider new initiatives being proposed in England and other devolved administrations, to determine if they will be suitable policies for Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the areas in Cookstown where the Housing Executive plans to carry out PVC window replacement schemes in the (i) 2011/12; and (ii) 2012/13 financial years.

(AQW 4872/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

A window replacement scheme for a total of 61 properties at Blackhill, Fountain Road, Killymoon Road, Killymoon Street, Mourneview, Riverside Drive, Union Place and Union Street, Cookstown is due to start this financial year in Cookstown. Additionally, an External Cyclical Maintenance scheme commenced in Cookstown during the current financial year which included window replacement where required to a total of 211 dwellings at Beechway, Coagh Crescent, Coagh Street, Fountain Road, Greenvale Drive, Ratheen Avenue and Sullenboy Park, Cookstown.

DSD: Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007.

(AQW 4909/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been 50 appointments of which 34 were reappointments (R) made to DSD public bodies since May 2007, as shown in the table below. The number of reappointments to the NIHE Board reflects the annual statutory nominations from the Housing Council. In relation to the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, the reappointments were made pending the abolition of the Board.

Name	Public Body
Mr M Butler (Chairman) (R) Mr D Morrice (Chairman) Mr D Morrice (R) Mr P Keers Mrs P Wilson Mr D Haslett Ms J Sloan	Charities Advisory Committee

Name	Public Body
Mr T McGrath Mr P Sloan Mr W Rader Ms A Chada Ms R Connelly Mr P McDonagh Mr P Cavanagh	Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
Mr K Murnaghan (R)	Vaughan's Charity Trust
Mr B Rowntree (Chairman) (R) Ms A Henderson(R) Mr E O'Neill(R) x 3 Mr J Speers(R) x 3 s J Palmer(R) x 3 Mr B Curran(R) x 3 Ms M Wilson(R) Ms E Dunbar Ms A Coffey Mr K Millar Mr S Begley	Northern Ireland Housing Executive Board
Mr S Millar (R) Dr M Curran(R) x 2 Ms H Fair(R) x 2 Dr A Jones(R) x 2 Ms M Kane(R) x 3 Dr N Stratton(R) x 2 Dr R Tubman(R) x 2 Dr EM Whitehead(R) x 2	Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for NI

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive homes in the Newry and Armagh constituency might benefit from the installation of double glazing as a result of the Programme for Government.

(AQW 4983/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

Following the consultation period and in anticipation of agreement to the draft Programme for Government, an extensive survey programme will be initiated to establish the number of Housing Executive dwellings that require double glazing. The Housing Executive will then draft a programme to ensure that double glazing is installed in all homes by the end of 2015.

In Armagh a window replacement scheme has already commenced for 85 properties and a second scheme is due to commence later this financial year for 161 properties; and in Newry a window replacement scheme is also due to commence this financial year for 144 properties.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Inner East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding his Department has allocated to the Inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) electoral ward; and (ii) geographical area.

(AQW 4999/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A funding breakdown is not readily available in the format requested but the table below details funding allocated by the Department for Social Development to Inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area in the last three years.

	Allocation 2009/10	Allocation 2010/11	Allocation 2011/12
Neighbourhood Renewal (Revenue)	£ 881,698.98	£937,037.17	£930,768.58
Neighbourhood Renewal (Capital)	£0.00	£1,065,000.00	£3,699,267.00
Physical Regeneration	£2,174,819.00	£1,723,770.00	£88,866.00

	Allocation 2009/10	Allocation 2010/11	Allocation 2011/12
Total	£3,056,517.98	£3,725,807.17	£4,718,901.58

Neighbourhood Renewal: Inner East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the groups which have submitted bids to provide services within the Inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area in each of the last three years, broken down by those bids which were (i) successful ; and (ii) unsuccessful.

(AQW 5000/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In each of last three years DSD received applications for Neighbourhood Renewal funding from the Inner East Belfast groups/organisations listed below, each of these bids was successful.

- Ashfield Boys School
- Ballymac Friendship Trust
- Bridge Community Association
- Community Drug Awareness (up to 4 September 2011)
- East Belfast Community Education Centre (up to 31 March 2010)
- East Belfast Community Development Agency
- East Belfast Partnership
- Inner East Youth Project
- Newtownards Road Women's Group
- Oasis – Caring in Action
- Short Strand Community Forum
- Short Strand Community Partnership
- Walkway Community Association

In the last three years Neighbourhood Renewal funding has been continuation or transitional in nature. This has given groups and organisations the opportunity to develop innovative, collaborative solutions to address need in neighbourhood renewal areas.

EXIT Group, East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all correspondence and meetings his Department has had with the EXIT Group, East Belfast.

(AQW 5004/11-15)

Mr McCausland: DSD staff involved in delivering Neighbourhood Renewal met with the EXIT Group on one occasion to discuss Neighbourhood Renewal within Inner East Belfast and the priorities identified within the local Neighbourhood Action Plan. This was followed up by an email response to clarify questions posed by the group.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Inner East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how his Department determines the individual needs of residents in the Inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

(AQW 5005/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Inner East Neighbourhood Renewal Area is identified as a priority area for intervention to address deprivation and disadvantage. The Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership (IENP) which consists of Community, Statutory and Political representatives has drawn up an Action Plan for Inner East based on local feedback from the Partnership members and also on statistical information from Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS). The Northern Ireland Housing Executive works closely with my Department's Belfast Regeneration Office and the IENP in relation to housing issues. Plans drawn up by the IENP are therefore developed in partnership with government and in consultation with local residents.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Inner East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how his Department informs residents of new initiatives and projects in the Inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

(AQW 5006/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Inner East Belfast has been identified as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area. The East Belfast Area Partnership Board, Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership, local groups and umbrella organisations such as East Belfast Community Development Agency are all used by my Department to promote Neighbourhood Renewal programmes/projects within Inner East Belfast. There will shortly be a review of Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership structures, membership, capacity on the ground and funding arrangements. In addition, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, through its Housing Community Network communicates regularly with around 400 groups across Northern Ireland.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will reconsider introducing legislation in relation to houses in multiple occupation to ensure that houses with fewer than four bedrooms are exempt.

(AQW 5010/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of bedrooms in a property is only one of the factors which contribute to the level of risk associated with houses in multiple occupation, others such as the number of occupants in the house, the age of occupants and the standard of management must all be considered. The Department has begun a fundamental review of the policy and legislation governing the regulation of houses in multiple occupation and the outcome of this review together with proposals for change will be subject to public consultation during 2012. The issue of smaller houses will be addressed in this consultation, although it is too early to say what the outcome will be.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps his Department is taking to increase the level of funding drawn down by the Enniskillen Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership.

(AQW 5114/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is working closely with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors involved in the Enniskillen Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership to deliver the projects which have been identified as priorities for the Enniskillen NRA. There are currently 8 projects requiring total funding of £921,500 from DSD being rolled out across the Enniskillen Neighbourhood Renewal Area and a further 9 projects requiring an estimated £1.04 million of DSD funding are being developed.

Social Housing: Armed Forces

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how he ensures that existing and former members of the armed forces are not disadvantaged in accessing social housing.[R]

(AQW 5141/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials from my Department and the Housing Executive are currently carrying out an examination of the Housing Selection Scheme to ensure that the Scheme remains fit for purpose. The work to date has identified an aspect of the Scheme that has the potential to prevent existing and former members of the armed forces who are, or have been, based in Northern Ireland from applying for social housing here. I have asked my officials to ensure that any such barriers in the Scheme are removed.

Hollywood Town Centre: Redevelopment

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the redevelopment of Hollywood town centre.

(AQW 5187/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is working with a developer to take forward a regeneration scheme in Hollywood, known as the Front within the next 2 years. The Department also plans to take forward a major public realm scheme in Hollywood during 2014/15, subject to funding being available and all approvals.

Customer Information System

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development why the computer programmes, under the aegis of the Customer Information System, that govern addressing correspondence within his Department, provide for the use of County Derry, rather than County Londonderry, and whether he will undertake to correct this.

(AQW 5193/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Customer Information System is one of a suite of computer systems provided by the Department for Work and Pensions to the Social Security Agency to enable the processing of claims to welfare benefits. Customer addresses within these system(s) are entered manually by Social Security Agency staff based on information provided by the customer.

- If a customer provides their address as Co. Derry then this will be recorded within the system(s); and,
- If the customer provides their address as Co. Londonderry then this will be recorded within the system(s).

If the address held within the system(s) for an individual customer is incorrect, then they should contact their relevant benefit office to have it amended.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development how many people who have had a ventriculoperitoneal shunting procedure have been granted Disability Living Allowance in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5273/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not record information on medical procedures for customers who have been granted Disability Living Allowance.

Newtownards Town Centre: Redevelopment

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the redevelopment of Newtownards town centre.

(AQW 5307/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In July 2010 DSD published a masterplan for Newtownards Town Centre. My Department is represented on the Implementation Board that Ards Borough Council established to take forward the actions proposed in the masterplan. One of the key recommendations was to revitalise Conway Square. A public realm scheme in this area will commence in January 2012. This scheme represents the first step of the outworking of the DSD funded Masterplan for Newtownards and will play an important role as a catalyst for the revitalisation of the town centre

Benefits: Brain Shunting Procedures

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development, excluding Disability Living Allowance, which benefits have been granted to people who have had a ventriculoperitoneal shunting procedure in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5313/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not possible to provide the information as my department does not record information on medical procedures for customers.

Social Housing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development when the Social and Affordable Housing Programme will be published, given that it is due to commence in 2012/13 as part of the draft Programme for Government,

(AQW 5370/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Housing Development Programme is currently being finalised by the Housing Executive. I expect to receive it by February next year and it will be published thereafter once approved.

Work Capability Assessment

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the Work Capability Assessment is unfair to those individuals with fluctuating illnesses and ailments which are difficult to assess without the aid of their General Practitioner; and if he intends to amend the Work Capability Assessment in order to fairly assess those people with mental and fluctuating illnesses.

(AQW 5384/11-15)

Mr McCausland: All Employment and Support Allowance customers are subject to the Work Capability Assessment process which includes completing a limited capability for work medical questionnaire and in most cases attending a medical examination. The Work Capability Assessment was developed in consultation with medical experts and a range of other customer representative groups to ensure that it is an accurate assessment of an individual's capability for work. The assessment looks at the functional effects of an individual's condition, rather than the condition itself. It is worth noting that Employment and Support Allowance has 10 mental health descriptors and 11 physical descriptors.

The role of the examining healthcare professional is to prepare a report for Employment and Support Allowance based on their independent and impartial medical assessment of the customer's ability to perform activities within each of the functional areas, by identifying the descriptors that they consider appropriate. This is based on their clinical assessment of the customer, which may include a relevant physical examination, interview and observation. The approved healthcare professional will also consider the effects of the condition on the claimant for the majority of the time, so that the opinion will not be based on a snapshot of their condition on the day of the medical assessment. A Social Security Agency Decision Maker will consider any evidence provided by the healthcare professional as well as the information provided in the limited capability for work medical questionnaire to determine if the Work Capability Assessment has been satisfied.

The approved healthcare professional's task of considering the effects of a condition is different from that of a GP needing to make a diagnosis and plan treatment. The interview and assessment may therefore be different from that which a claimant might expect from their GP. Any evidence provided by a customer's GP or consultant is very important and fully considered, and processes are in place to ensure it can be requested when it will help provide advice on benefit entitlement. However, although the claimant's health condition or the GP/Consultant's diagnosis is not being disputed, GPs are unlikely to have the knowledge of the benefit system or disability analysis to provide the decision-maker with comprehensive information about the functional effects in relation to work capability.

My Department will continue to review the Work Capability Assessment and to make changes where necessary to ensure that our high standards of support continue.

Social Housing

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the proposed annual breakdown of the delivery of 8,000 social and affordable homes, divided into each classification, as stated within the draft Programme for Government.

(AQO 943/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Programme for Government contains a commitment to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes over the next four years. A specific programme to deliver both the social and affordable homes is now being developed. For example, the Housing Executive are currently finalising the Social Housing Development Programme for 2012-2015 and I expect it to be with me for consideration by February or March next year.

Welfare Reform

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development how he is presenting, to the Department for Work and Pensions, the unique difficulties that Northern Ireland will face by maintaining strict parity with Great Britain on welfare reform.

(AQO 949/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As Minister for Social development I would endorse the need to reform our existing welfare system to ensure it is fit for purpose into the future. The welfare reform agenda currently being pursued by the Westminster coalition Government is both wide ranging and complex, seeking to simplify the benefits' regime, to incentivise individuals to take up work and to ensure that work always pays. These are laudable aspirations but there is no doubt they represent significant challenges to implement here in Northern Ireland where we have some particular difficulties as a consequence of geographical remoteness and the fact that we are somewhat lagging behind the rest of the UK in terms of recovery from the recent economic downturn.

Officials from my Department have regular and ongoing communication with the Department for Work and Pensions. I would be surprised if there was not contact at some level on a daily basis. DSD / SSA are represented at a wide range of meetings and workshops at all levels with the Department for Work and Pensions to inform the introduction of Welfare Reform. Departmental officials, along with representatives from the Social Security Agency have also held a number of meetings with Social Development Committee and others have been scheduled over the next two months specifically to brief them on key elements of the upcoming Welfare Reform Bill. Communication is not however restricted to official level, as Minister for Social Development I have had discussions with Whitehall counterparts on a number of occasions around different aspects of welfare reform and I will continue to make representations on behalf of Northern Ireland as the reform agenda is progressed.

The principle of 'parity' dictates that an individual here in Northern Ireland will receive the same by way of benefits, and be subject to the same conditions of entitlement, as an individual elsewhere in the UK. It must however be remembered that if we are to depart from the 'parity' arrangements then Northern Ireland would be expected to meet any associated costs and this money would inevitably have to be found from within our block grant. In addition there would be logistical and operational constraints arising given our dependence on the Department for Work and Pensions IT systems which are utilised to deliver benefits here.

Pensioners: Benefit Uptake

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the advice that is given to pensioners to aid benefit uptake.

(AQO 945/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department, through the Social Security Agency, provides a wide range of services to make people aware of their entitlement to benefit. These include outreach services, the production of specific publications, participation in local community level promotional activity, use of the NI Direct website, an online Benefits Adviser Service and general assistance and information available through the network of local and centralised benefits offices.

Since 2005, specific actions have been undertaken annually as part of the Benefit Uptake Programme, to reach existing and potential new customers who may have unclaimed entitlement. The focus of this work in recent years has been on older people, those living with disability and their carers.

Benefit Uptake activities include on an ongoing basis:

- information and awareness
- use of existing data to identify those already receiving benefits who may be entitled to more
- direct invitations to existing customers offering a full and confidential benefits assessments to help identify additional entitlement
- involvement of the independent advice sector
- assistance with making a claim, including home visits to vulnerable customers to help with the completion of forms
- A Freephone Benefits Advice Line specifically aimed at all those aged 60 and over to encourage them to check their entitlement.

This work has generated an additional £27.1m in unclaimed benefit for older people since it began in 2005.

The 2011/12 Benefit Uptake Programme consists of four separate but complementary strands of work:

- Writing directly to 25,000 existing customers, the majority of which are over 60, who may have additional benefit entitlement, to offer them a full and confidential benefits assessment. The assessment is provided by the independent advice sector.
- A promotional Outreach to Older People approach which works with trusted local council and community level partners including community groups, specific Older People's Groups, General Practitioners, pharmacies, libraries, churches and other faith based groups, to promote a Freephone Benefits Advice Line to encourage Older People to check that they are getting all that they are entitled to.
- The "Make the Call" advertising campaign is new to the 2011/12 Benefit Uptake Programme. The campaign was developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in improving the lives of older people. It uses television, radio, newspaper advertising and outdoor promotion to encourage those aged 60 and over to "Make the Call" to the Freephone Benefits Advice Line to see if they are missing out on benefits and other services and support.

- The Social Security Agency is also working with community and voluntary sector partners in order to test new ways of reaching those harder to engage who could have additional benefit entitlement. £375,000 from the Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake was recently allocated to 7 projects focusing on a range of customer groupings, such as older people in supported accommodation, those living with disability, those affected by cancer and their carers. These projects will run for twelve months and evaluation will inform future benefit uptake approaches by my Department.

All benefit assessments carried out, whether by independent sector partners funded by the Department or the Social Security Agency's team of expert benefits advice staff, explores potential entitlement to all social security benefits, but also Housing Benefit, Rates Relief, the Warm Homes Scheme and other services and support which may have the potential to improve the income and wellbeing of older people.

The Make the Call campaign has had an encouraging start. It began on 14 November and the first two weeks of operation have seen over 3,000 calls to the Freephone line and over 2,500 callers having availed of a full benefit assessment.

I am particularly encouraged to report that more than 40% of those calling the Freephone number have had potential additional entitlement to benefits (social security and wider) services and support identified.

Social Housing

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of social housing properties that will be built in the next 12 months, broken down by constituency
(AQW 5555/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current Social Housing Development Programme is already available on the Housing Executive website. It shows a total of 1'973 units in the gross programme from which we would expect to deliver 1'400 units subject to planning approvals etc.

The programme for 2012/13 and beyond is currently being developed by the Housing Executive and will not be available until Spring next year.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Neighbourhood Renewal funding arrangements, and whether the next contracts that are awarded will be for a three-year period.
(AQO 952/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As Minister for the Department for Social Development I have become increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of our investment in the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. It was intended to be a cross cutting programme but 7 years on, some Departments still fail to engage effectively with the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Boards to make a real impact on the lives of those living in areas of disadvantage. I have as you are aware instigated strategic reviews of those areas of the Department that are not working as effectively as they might, for example in Housing and Fuel Poverty and I will be adopting the same approach to Neighbourhood Renewal. I will look at what works well for example Early Intervention strategies, and how lessons can be shared across the 36 Partnership Boards to maximise the impact of available Neighbourhood Renewal resources. This will include looking at Partnership structures, membership, capacity on the ground and funding arrangements.

Educational Underachievement

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to engage with other Departments to address the negative impact social deprivation has on educational early-years child care provision and subsequent academic success.
(AQO 953/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As the Department with responsibility for bringing forward Neighbourhood Renewal – the Executive's strategy for tackling social deprivation in urban areas, my Department has in the past, does now and will continue to work with all departments to address the range of social deprivation issues which affect a young persons life chances.

This includes working with the Department for Education on all its early years initiatives. I have met with Minister O'Dowd and discussed a number of issues around pre school education and other initiatives. We are supportive of a range of initiatives within the health family including nurture groups, family nurse partnerships and initiatives that address attachment issues. This will see a greater proportion of the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund used for Early Interventions with a number of tried and tested programmes introduced across many areas. This work will see greater collaboration between all the agencies and departments delivering services in these areas.

I am personally committed to encouraging early interventions – they yield the most return in terms of influencing the life chances of young people, they address the causes rather than managing the symptoms. I am particularly committed to developing childcare initiatives and would be happy to chair a cross Departmental group on this issue – should this prove helpful.

I want to see more Neighbourhood Renewal funding committed to early interventions. Officials are currently working with all other Departments to see how this can best happen. Already a number of Neighbourhood Renewal partnerships have introduced this approach, for example Colin Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership has refocused its approach to tackling social deprivation by making Colin an 'Early Interventions Community'

Whilst childcare is not specifically a matter for the Department for Social Development, my Department contributes to the provision of childcare places through the Voluntary and Community Unit Women's Childcare Fund and Neighbourhood Renewal funding. These childcare places are primarily focussed on disadvantaged areas and may therefore assist those in poverty in gaining employment or accessing education and training.

Social Housing

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Social Development what potential exists to rationalise the functions exercised by his Department, the Housing Executive and Housing Associations, to ensure maximum effectiveness in meeting social housing needs.

(AQO 954/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I believe that we currently have a real opportunity to make substantial change and there is considerable potential to rationalise the effectiveness in meeting social housing need. I am awaiting the final report from PWC on the fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I will duly consider it. I have not yet decided on my preferred direction of travel for the future of the Housing Executive but whatever route I choose will also affect the administration of housing within my Department. It would be remiss of me not to consider the other main social housing providers in the Housing Association movement and I will be considering how best to review and reinvigorate this important sector. The decisions I take now will ensure that social housing providers are fit to discharge their housing responsibilities for the next two decades.

Fuel Poverty

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the assistance his Department provides to people in fuel poverty.

(AQO 955/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In April of this year, my Department launched its new fuel poverty strategy 'Warmer Healthier Homes'. This strategy sets out our vision for the future as 'a society in which people live in a warm, comfortable home and need not worry about the effect of the cold on their health'. The strategy places significant emphasis on the partnership approach required to tackle fuel poverty. The strategy takes forward a range of initiatives including energy brokering and introducing a pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme.

The Housing Executive is confident they will have an energy brokering scheme in place to market test by the end of March 2012. In June 2011 I launched a pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme and £2 million has been made available to replace approximately 1,330 boilers. My Department continues to deliver the Warm Homes Scheme

As part of its 2011/12 Benefit Uptake Programme, the Social Security Agency is writing directly to 25,000 existing customers who may have additional benefit entitlement, to offer them a full and confidential assessment. This assessment, provided by the Independent Advice Sector partner, Advice NI, will explore potential entitlement to all social security benefits. It will also provide advice about Housing Benefit, Rates Relief and the Warm Homes Scheme.

The Social Security Agency's Outreach to Older People Campaign promotes a Freephone Benefits Advice Line. Anyone who contacts the number will receive a full benefits assessment which includes information on Warm Homes. They will also be offered help with making a claim should it be required.

The Advice Line is currently being heavily promoted through a province-wide advertising campaign using television, radio, press and outdoor locations. The "Make the Call" campaign began on 14 November and will run to March 2012. To date there have been over 3,000 calls received.

The Social Security Agency is also working with community and voluntary sector partners in order to test new ways of reaching those harder to engage who could have additional benefit entitlement. £375,000 from the Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake was recently allocated to seven projects focusing on a range of customer groupings, such as older people in supported accommodation, low income families, those living with disability, those affected by cancer and their careers, young people not in education, training or employment. Projects will run for twelve months and evaluation will inform future benefit uptake approaches.

I have recently announced an exciting and innovative Pay as You Go option for oil heating for vulnerable households. A pilot scheme will begin early in the New Year and the technology could see significant savings for those using drums rather than having oil delivered in larger quantities. I have met with representatives from Kingspan Environmental and Carillion Energy Services who will be taking the pilot forward. This pilot will allow us to road test a unique technology which will allow oil from tanks to be released to boilers as needed, helping those most in need to budget and benefit from the savings gained by those buying oil in larger quantities.

Fuel Poverty: Programme for Government

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development why the draft Programme for Government does not include detailed initiatives to tackle fuel poverty.

(AQO 956/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The draft Programme for Government does include initiatives to tackle fuel poverty. One of the key commitments within the Programme for Government is to ensure that all Housing Executive properties have double glazing installed by

that appears to the Commission to be a political matter. The Commission strives at all times to be impartial in serving the Assembly and its Members.

Web Browsers: Proceedings of the Assembly

Mr Craig asked the Assembly Commission what action it is taking to ensure that users of web browsers, other than Internet Explorer, can view the live and recorded proceedings of the Assembly over the internet.

(AQW 5211/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The current live streaming service is based on Windows Media technology and as such, non-Internet Explorer users require Windows Media player software in order to access the proceedings. The Assembly website provides instructions for users to download the free Windows Media player software. For computers with operating systems other than Microsoft Windows, a link has been provided to download a free media player which will allow the video content to be played. The Communications Office intends to tender for a new video streaming contract in 2012 and this will address the issues of browser compatibility that exist at present.

Employer's Pension Contribution

Mr Nesbitt asked the Assembly Commission whether employer's pension contribution is made to Sinn Fein Members at the rate of the industrial wage or at the full Assembly wage rate.

(AQW 5504/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission makes pensions contributions to the Pension Fund in respect of all active scheme members. The contribution paid is a percentage rate of the Members' total salary (i.e. £43,101 plus any office holder element)

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Bovine TB

In this Bound Volume, page WA129, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4721/11-15) asked by Mrs Dobson with:

Ms O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I had previously provided you with an answer to this question on the 29th November 2011, I now wish to revise that answer as below.

We are now in a good position to eradicate Brucellosis within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

I am also committed to the eradication of TB and I will continue to work towards this end, but eradication will not be achievable within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

We have a rigorous programme for TB eradication in place and considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.15% at 30 September 2011. The herd incidence rates for the year 2010 as submitted to the EU in the relevant Eradication Plans are 5.07% in the north, 8.72% in England, 6.58% in Wales and 4.65% in the south. Our TB eradication programme is approved by the EU Commission, which is vital to safeguard our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry.

While the progress made in reducing the incidence of TB is encouraging, we continue to seek more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of bovine TB from cattle to cattle and between wildlife and cattle. TB is a very complex, multi-factorial and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and science still does not know with certainty how the disease is spread between cattle and between wildlife and cattle and what can be done to prevent its spread. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We are engaging with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Bovine TB

In this Bound Volume, page WA130, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4799/11-15) asked by Mr Frew with:

Ms O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I had previously provided you with an answer to this question on the 29th November 2011, I now wish to revise that answer as below.

We are now in a good position to eradicate Brucellosis within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

I am also committed to the eradication of TB and I will continue to work towards this end, but eradication will not be achievable within the timeframe of the draft Programme for Government.

We have a rigorous programme for TB eradication in place and considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.15% at 30 September 2011. The herd incidence rates for the year 2010 as submitted to the EU in the relevant Eradication Plans are 5.07% in the north, 8.72% in England, 6.58% in Wales and 4.65% in the south. Our TB eradication programme is approved by the EU Commission, which is vital to safeguard our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry.

While the progress made in reducing the incidence of TB is encouraging, we continue to seek more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of bovine TB from cattle to cattle and between wildlife and cattle. TB is a very complex, multi-factorial and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and science still does not know with certainty how the disease is spread between cattle and between wildlife and cattle and what can be done to prevent its spread. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We are engaging with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Bovine TB

In this Bound Volume, page WA131, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4806/11-15) asked by Mr Easton with:

Ms O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I had previously provided you with an answer to this question on the 29th November 2011, I now wish to revise that answer as below.

We have a rigorous programme for TB eradication in place. We have achieved EU Commission approval for this programme for 2010 and 2011 and formal approval for our 2012 programme is expected in the near future. This eradication programme is vital in safeguarding our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. Having EU Commission approval also enables DARD to draw down €5 million co-funding from Europe for 2010 and €4 million co-funding for 2011 to offset a proportion of the costs of the programme.

I am pleased that considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here. The annual herd incidence has almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.15% at 30 September 2011. The herd incidence rates for the year 2010 as submitted to the EU in the relevant Eradication Plans are 5.07% in the north, 8.72% in England, 6.58% in Wales and 4.65% in the south. My aim is to reduce and ultimately eradicate TB in cattle here and I will continue to work towards this end.

Considerable work has been undertaken to enhance the TB eradication programme in recent years. We now remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test rather than after a third test as before. We have improved communications with Private Veterinary Practitioners and strengthened the supervision process. We have improved DARD's own delivery of TB testing through monitoring Key Performance Indicators. We also use DNA identity tags on reactors to help reduce reactor identity queries, substitution fraud and associated disease risks.

While the progress made in reducing the incidence of TB is encouraging, we continue to seek more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of bovine TB from cattle to cattle and between wildlife and cattle. TB is a very complex, multi-factorial and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and science still does not know with certainty how the disease is spread between cattle and between wildlife and cattle and what can be done to prevent its spread. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We are engaging with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

Education

Teachers on Medical Suspension

In Bound Volume 68, page WA363, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4105/11-15) asked by Mr D Bradley with:

The Department does not hold this information and therefore contacted the five Education and Library Boards and CCMS to provide the information which is detailed in the table below. A breakdown by board area is not appropriate due to the small numbers involved and the sensitive nature of the data.

All Board Areas	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Teachers on medical suspension	16	18	20
Returned to post	13	14	13
Redeployed	0	0	0
Retired on Incapacity Pension	1	2	1
Dismissed	0	0	0

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Homeless Organisations: Funding

In Bound Volume 68, page WA215, replace the answer to the question (AQW 3642/11-15) asked by Mr P Ramsey with:

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My Department does not directly provide funding for homeless organisations. However, funding is being provided to homeless organisations by the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Trusts. The total amount of funding allocated to homeless organisations in the current financial year is £2,418,757. I am unable, at this time, to provide details of allocated future years funding.

Homeless Organisations in the Foyle Constituency: Funding

In Bound Volume 68, page WA245, replace the answer to the question (AQW 3643/11-15) asked by Mr P Ramsey with:

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My Department does not track the allocation of funding by District or City Council area, nor does my Department directly provide funding for homeless organisations. However, the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency have allocated a total of £741,004 in the current financial year to homeless organisations in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. The funding is primarily used to provide accommodation and support for homeless people with chronic alcohol difficulties. I am unable, at this time, to provide details of future years funding.

Justice

Department of Justice: Public Appointments

In this Bound Volume, page WA262, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4827/11-15) asked by Mr Eastwood with:

Mr Ford (The Minister for Justice): There was an error contained in my answer of 29 November 2011.

The answer stated that I made 29 public appointments, but this should have read 31 as my response did not include the appointment of two Parole Commissioners, which are now listed in the amended table below.

Name of Body	Name of Appointee	Date of Appointment	Date of Re-appointment
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	Dr M Maguire	Prior to June 2010	01/09/11
Northern Ireland Policing Board	Mr S B Rea Mr G Ó hEáira Ms A M Connolly Mr R J Feeney Mr J S McDonnell Mrs J T O'Hagan Mr B M Rowntree Mr M T Wardlow Ms D Watters	Prior to June 2010 Prior to June 2010 24/05/11 24/05/11 24/05/11 24/05/11 24/05/11 24/05/11 24/05/11	24/05/11 24/05/11
Northern Ireland Law Commission	Professor S Doran Mr R Hunniford Mr N Faris Dr V Iyer	Prior to June 2010 Prior to June 2010 Prior to June 2010 Prior to June 2010	10/03/11 10/03/11 10/03/11 01/09/11
Independent Monitoring Board - Maghaberry Prison	Mr P R Lees Mr A Khamassi Mr A Hussain Ms A M McCauley Mrs S E Cunningham Mrs V C McConnell Mr A Abolarin	01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10	

Name of Body	Name of Appointee	Date of Appointment	Date of Re-appointment
Independent Monitoring Board - Magilligan Prison	Mr J P Devlin Mr F B Doherty Ms J Burke Mrs B McCollum Mr P E McAteer Mr P Martin	01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10	
Independent Monitoring Board - Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre & Prison	Mr B Lewis Ms C Allen Mrs L Williamson Mrs J O'Loan Mr F M Walsh Miss C V Stoll Mr M J Love Mrs N Francis Mr J Irvine	01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10 01/07/10	
Parole Commissioners	Judge Norman Lockie Ms Anne Grimes	01/08/11 21/11/11	
Judicial Appointments Ombudsman	Mr K Singh	Prior to June 2010	25/09/11

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 21 November 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - European Commission Disallowance of Single Farm Payments

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the European Commission Disallowance of Single Farm Payments, following which she replied to questions.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - River Cleaning Strategy

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of the Environment and their Executive colleagues to develop a co-ordinated strategy to improve how rivers are cleaned.

Mr S Hamilton

Lord Morrow

3.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'improve' and insert:

'the management of our rivers so that they are kept to the highest levels of cleanliness; and further calls on the Executive to ensure that the expertise and services of non-governmental organisations and stakeholders are part of that management arrangement.'

Mr D Kinahan

Mr R Swann

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 2.17pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion: Community Libraries

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses great concern about the reduction in the opening hours of small community libraries which will curtail their ability to deliver an efficient and effective service; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to take action to ensure that the excellent service provided by these libraries is maintained.

Mrs K McKeivitt

Mr D Bradley

5.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Insert after 'Assembly':

'welcomes the decision by the Board of Libraries NI to initiate a review of eight of the ten rural libraries that were originally earmarked for closure;'

Mr O McMullan

Ms C Ruane

Mr C Ó'hOisín

The Question being put, the Amendment was made without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was carried without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.10pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

21 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 18 - 21 November 2011

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
 - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Resource Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DFP)
 - Belfast Education and Library Board Annual Report 2009-2010 (DE)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - (The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/398 The Planning (Fees) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
 - For Information Only:**
 - S.R. 2011/399 The One-Way Traffic (Belfast) (Amendment No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - The Upper Age Limit for Jury Service in Northern Ireland: A Consultation (DOJ)
9. Departmental Publications
 - Proposals for a Pensions Bill - Completed Equality Impact Assessment (DSD)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 22 November 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Motion - Employment and Support Allowance (Work-related Activity) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Employment and Support Allowance (Work-related Activity) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion - The Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.3 Motion: The Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Member's Business

3.1 Motion: Rate Relief for Community and Amateur Sports Clubs

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the benefits which community and amateur sports clubs bring to local communities; notes the vital role which they play in encouraging participation in sporting activities and the contribution they make in promoting healthy lifestyles; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to raise the rate relief afforded to these clubs from 80 percent to 100 percent to ensure parity with equivalent clubs in other parts of the UK.

Mr R Swann

Mr L Cree

3.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Personnel' and insert:

'to examine the rate relief afforded to these clubs.'

*Mr S Hamilton
Mr A McQuillan
Mr W Humphrey
Mr D Hilditch*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

3.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

4. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Rate Relief for Community and Amateur Sports Clubs (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

5. Adjournment

The Lord Morrow spoke to his topic on Flooding in the Clogher Valley.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.41pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

22 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
22 November 2011**

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
Probation Board for Northern Ireland Retention and Disposal Schedule 2011 (DCAL)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 28 November 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Public Petition - Reduction in Opening Hours of Community Libraries

Mr Dominic Bradley was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the reduction in opening hours of community libraries.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - DEL Related Teacher Training Issues

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding DEL Related Teacher Training Issues, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

3.2 Motion: Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Committee Business

4.1 (a) Motion - Amendment Standing Order 49A

Proposed:

Leave out Standing Order 49A and insert -

'Committee for Justice

(1) The statutory committee established to advise and assist the Minister of Justice (in this Standing Order referred to as 'the Committee for Justice') shall -

- (a) review the operation of the amendments made by Schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009;
- (b) report on its review by 30 April 2012; and
- (c) include in its report any recommendations it has for changes to the way in which judicial office holders are appointed and removed.

- (2) A person cannot be a member of the Committee for Justice if that person is a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, a district policing partnership or a sub-group of the Belfast district policing partnership.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.2 (b) Motion - Amend Standing Orders

Proposed:

Leave out Standing Order 49B.

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.3 (c) Motion - Amend Standing Order 59

Proposed:

In Standing Order 59, leave out paragraph (4A).

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.4 (d) Motion - Amend Standing Order 65(6)

Proposed:

In Standing Order 65(6) line 2, leave out -

' , if he or she thinks it necessary, adjourn the Assembly without question put or suspend any sitting for one hour.'

and insert -

' - (a) suspend the sitting until a later time on that sitting day; or (b) adjourn the Assembly without question put.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - School Closures in the SEELB Area

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the school closures announced within the South Eastern Education and Library Board area to date; is concerned that the Board is making these decisions ahead of the outcome of the review of schools being conducted by the Department of Education; is further concerned that, unlike all other Education and Library Boards, this Board is run by Commissioners with no political input; and calls on the Minister of Education to intervene on this important matter.

Mr A Easton

Miss M McIlveen

Mr P Weir

Mrs B Hale

5.2 Amendment**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Minister of Education' and insert:

'to postpone any decisions until the viability audit has been completed.'

*Mr C McDevitt
Mrs K McKeivitt*

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

6. Question Time**6.1 Agriculture and Rural Development**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)**7.1 Motion - School Closures in the SEELB Area (Cont'd)**

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7.2 Motion - Retention and Release of Information from Police Officers

Following receipt of a valid Petition of Concern (See Appendix 1), under Standing Order 28, Members were informed that the vote on the motion would be taken at the start of business on Tuesday 29 November.

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce effective measures to ensure that information and evidence provided by former or serving police officers is retained and released to any independent investigation into allegations of police wrongdoing.

*Mr P Sheehan
Mr G Kelly
Mr R McCartney
Ms J McCann*

7.3 Amendment

The following Amendment stood on the Marshalled List of Amendments in the names of Mr B McCrea, Mr J McCallister and Mr R Hussey.

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'released' and insert:

'when necessary for any investigation.'

The Amendment was **not moved**.

Debate ensued on the Motion.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.15pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

28 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Petition of Concern

Motion: Retention and Release of Information from Police Officers

Date to be debated: 28 November 2011

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly present this Petition of Concern in accordance with Standing Order 28.

Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Jonathan Bell
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Gregory Campbell
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Jonathan Craig
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Gordon Dunne
Mr Alex Easton
Mrs Arlene Foster
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr Paul Givan
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Mr William Irwin
Ms Pam Lewis
Mr Nelson Mccausland
Mr Ian Mccrea
Mr David Mcilveen
Miss Michelle Mcilveen
Mr Adrian Mcquillan
The Lord Morrow
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Robin Newton
Mr Edwin Poots
Mr George Robinson
Rt Hon Peter Robinson
Mr Alastair Ross
Mr Jimmy Spratt
Mr Mervyn Storey
Mr Peter Weir
Mr Jim Wells
Mr Sammy Wilson

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4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
The Southern Health and Social Care Trust Fund Accounts 2010-11 (DHSSPS)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
Defacement Removal Notices: Statutory Guidance for District Councils (DOE)
9. Departmental Publications
DETI: The Bioscience and Technology Institute (NIAO)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
Education Act 2011 - Chapter 21
Localism Act 2011 - Chapter 20
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 29 November 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Public Petition - Impact on local residents of the reduction in funding for community pharmacies

Mr Kieran McCarthy was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the impact on local residents of the reduction in funding for community pharmacies.

2.2 Public Petition - Reduction in opening hours of the Bronte Library in Rathfriland

Mr John McCallister was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the reduction in opening hours of the Bronte Library in Rathfriland.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Retention and Release of Information from Police Officers (vote on the motion without debate)

The motion was debated on 28 November 2011. A valid Petition of Concern was presented under Standing Order 28 on 28 November 2011 in relation to the motion. The vote on the motion was taken on 29 November 2011.

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce effective measures to ensure that information and evidence provided by former or serving police officers is retained and released to any independent investigation into allegations of police wrongdoing.

*Mr P Sheehan
Mr G Kelly
Mr R McCartney
Ms J McCann*

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community basis (Division 1).

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting, held on 18 November 2011, following which he replied to questions.

4.2 Statement - British Irish Council meeting on Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding the British Irish Council meeting on Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages, held in Gweedore, Co. Donegal, on 11 November 2011, following which she replied to questions.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion - Report on the Review of the Initial Ministerial Provision in relation to the Department of Justice and the arrangements from 1 May 2012

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the Report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (NIA 18/11-15) on its Review of the Initial Ministerial Provision in relation to the Department of Justice and the arrangements from 1 May 2012.

Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.25pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

6.2 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

7. Committee Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion - Report on the Review of the Initial Ministerial Provision in relation to the Department of Justice and the arrangements from 1 May 2012 (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

8. Private Members' Business

8.1 Motion - Sentencing for Crimes Against Older and Vulnerable People

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises that older and vulnerable people are deserving of respect and safety in their homes; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce legislation to impose mandatory minimum prison sentences for people who are found guilty of violent crimes against older or vulnerable people.

Mr P Givan

Mr P Weir

Mr S Anderson

Mr J Wells

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried (Division 2).

9. Adjournment

Mr Paul Maskey spoke to his topic on lack of funding for the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Employment Services Board.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.37pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

29 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

29 November 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Retention and Release of Information from Police Officers - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce effective measures to ensure that information and evidence provided by former or serving police officers is retained and released to any independent investigation into allegations of police wrongdoing.

*Mr P Sheehan
Mr G Kelly
Mr R McCartney
Ms J McCann*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 34
Noes: 58

AYES

Nationalist

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.

NOES

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr I McCrea and Mr McQuillan.

Total votes	92	Total Ayes	34	[37.0%]
Nationalist Votes	34	Nationalist Ayes	34	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	50	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The Motion was **negatived** (cross-community vote).

Northern Ireland Assembly

29 November 2011

Divisions

Division No. 2

Sentencing for Crimes Against Older and Vulnerable People - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises that older and vulnerable people are deserving of respect and safety in their homes; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce legislation to impose mandatory minimum prison sentences for people who are found guilty of violent crimes against older or vulnerable people.

Mr P Givan

Mr P Weir

Mr S Anderson

Mr J Wells

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 44

Noes: 41

AYES

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr Craig.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr A Maginness.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 29 November 2011

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
 - Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2010 (DFP)
 - An Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment - Year 2 (DSD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - (The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - Draft SR/2011 The Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DHSSPS)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 5 December 2011

The Assembly met at 12 noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Motion - The Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Minister for Employment and Learning

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion: The Draft Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the draft Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Minister for Employment and Learning

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Community Transport Scheme

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the dependency that our rural communities have on the Community Transport Scheme for medical visits and hospital appointments; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to ensure that this service is sustained to facilitate the most vulnerable people in our society.

Mr O McMullan

Mr S Lynch

Mr P Doherty

Mr C Ó hOisín

3.2 Amendment**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'medical visits' and insert:

'and access to other local services; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work closely with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that this service is sustained to facilitate the most vulnerable people in our society.'

Mr R Beggs

Mr M Copeland

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

3.3 Motion - Public Sector Pensions**Proposed:**

That this Assembly believes that the proposed increases in public sector pension contributions are wrong and unjustified, and that they will have a significant adverse impact on many workers; calls on the British Government to respond positively to the trade unions' proposals on pension reform and funding; and further calls on the Executive to review and reverse its decision, of September 2011, to impose a 3.2 percent increase on contributions by members of the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee scheme.

Mr M Durkan

Mr C Eastwood

Mrs D Kelly

Dr A McDonnell

3.4 Amendment 1**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'recognises the fundamental changes to public sector pension provision across the United Kingdom; expresses disappointment that a resolution could not be found and that strike action was deemed necessary by trade unions; and calls on the trade unions and the UK Government to continue negotiations with a view to finding a solution and preventing further strike action in the future on this matter.'

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr L Cree

Mr J McCallister

3.5 Amendment 2**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Executive' and insert:

'to respond to this imposition in a manner which excludes members of the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee scheme; notes the proposal by the Minister of Education to exclude all other public sector workers who earn less than £32,000 per year; and calls on all Ministers to explore similar options.'

Mr M McLaughlin

Mr P Maskey

Mr C Murphy

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

4. Question Time

4.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

4.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Public Sector Pensions (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

Amendment No. 1 being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 1).

Amendment No. 2 was not put.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 2).

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.38pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

5 December 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

5 December 2011
Division 1

Public Sector Pensions - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'recognises the fundamental changes to public sector pension provision across the United Kingdom; expresses disappointment that a resolution could not be found and that strike action was deemed necessary by trade unions; and calls on the trade unions and the UK Government to continue negotiations with a view to finding a solution and preventing further strike action in the future on this matter.'

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr L Cree

Mr J McCallister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 55

Noes: 28

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beggs and Mr Cree.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr McGlone.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

5 December 2011
Division 2

Public Sector Pensions - Motion as amended

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the fundamental changes to public sector pension provision across the United Kingdom; expresses disappointment that a resolution could not be found and that strike action was deemed necessary by trade unions; and calls on the trade unions and the UK Government to continue negotiations with a view to finding a solution and preventing further strike action in the future on this matter.

The Question, as amended, was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 54

Noes: 28

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Nesbitt and Mr Spratt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Byrne and Mr McDevitt.

The Motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 30 November - 5 December 2011

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

Strategic Investment Board Limited - Annual Review and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2011 (OFMDFM)

General Report on the Health and Social Care Sector by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland - 2010 and 2011 (NIAO)

Office of the Social Fund Commissioner for Northern Ireland Annual Report 2010-2011 (DSD)

Social Fund Annual Report 2010/2011 (DSD)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Guidance for District Councils on Gating Orders Legislation (DOE)

The Fluorinated Greenhouse Gases (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications

Sickness in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2010/11 (DFP)

House of Commons Members' Contributory Pension (Northern Ireland) Fund Report by the Government Actuary's Department on the Financial Position as at 31 March 2008 (DFP)

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Investment Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DOJ)

Department of Health and Children and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety North-South Feasibility Study (DHSSPS)

Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy – Annual Report 2010-11 (DETI)

Consultation on the Programme for Government 2011-15 (OFMDFM)

Consultation on Taxi Fare and Taximeter Regulations (DOE)

10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 6 December 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Francie Molloy) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Public Petition - Opposition to Hydraulic Fracturing in Northern Ireland

Mr Stephen Agnew was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to opposition to Hydraulic Fracturing in Northern Ireland.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - "Connected Health" Issues

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding "Connected Health" Issues, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement - Launch of Health and Wealth Memorandum of Understanding

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the launch of the Health and Wealth Memorandum of Understanding, following which she replied to questions.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion: Hydraulic Fracturing

Proposed:

That this Assembly believes that a moratorium should be placed on the onshore and offshore exploration, development and production of shale gas by withdrawing licences for hydraulic fracturing (fracking), at least until the publication of a detailed environmental impact assessment into the practice; notes that hydraulic fracturing can put local water sources at risk of contamination; further notes that, amongst a variety of adverse environmental impacts, the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts, which put both workers and local communities at risk; considers that the production of hard-to-reach fossil fuels is not compatible with efforts to achieve carbon reduction targets; and urges the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give greater support to the generation of energy from renewable sources instead.

Mr S Agnew

Ms A Lo

Mr C Lyttle

Mr S Dickson

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 11.39am because of disorder in the public gallery. It resumed at 11.41am and debate continued on the motion.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. Junior Minister, Ms Martina Anderson, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

5.3 Assembly Commission

Questions were put to, and answered by, Members of the Assembly Commission.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Hydraulic Fracturing

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried (Division 1).

6.2 Motion - Impact of the Introduction of the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive is to come into effect from January 2012; recognises that the introduction of a ban on the use of battery cages has led to significant modifications on many farms; notes with concern that one third of Europe's egg industries will not be compliant with the new regulations by January 2012; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how she will ensure that Northern Ireland's egg producers will not be disadvantaged by cheaper imports which derive from non-compliant producers.

Mrs J Dobson

Mr R Swann

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Miss Michelle McIlveen spoke to her topic on the Regeneration of Portavogie.

The Speaker took the Chair.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.30pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

6 December 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

6 December 2011
Division 1

Hydraulic Fracturing - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly believes that a moratorium should be placed on the onshore and offshore exploration, development and production of shale gas by withdrawing licences for hydraulic fracturing (fracking), at least until the publication of a detailed environmental impact assessment into the practice; notes that hydraulic fracturing can put local water sources at risk of contamination; further notes that, amongst a variety of adverse environmental impacts, the process of fracking can cause serious well blowouts, which put both workers and local communities at risk; considers that the production of hard-to-reach fossil fuels is not compatible with efforts to achieve carbon reduction targets; and urges the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give greater support to the generation of energy from renewable sources instead.

*Mr S Agnew
Ms A Lo
Mr C Lyttle
Mr S Dickson*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 49
Noes: 30

AYES

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Ms Lo.

NOES

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr S Anderson and Mr Dunne.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Allister, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 6 December 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (DOJ)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/404 The Planning (General Development) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
 - Draft SR 2011 The Sunbeds (Fixed Penalty) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DHSSPS)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
Proposal on Possible Exemption of Certain Categories of Historic Vehicles from MOT Testing (DOE)
A Consultation Document on the Department's Proposals for Transitional Provisions (DOE)
A Consultation Document on the Department's Proposals for Goods Vehicles Operators' Fees (DOE)
Support for Mortgage Interest - Informal Call for Evidence (DSD)
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 December 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Withdrawal from EU Summit Agreement

Ms Margaret Ritchie made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU Summit Agreement. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Aquaculture and Marine sectoral format, held on 14 October 2011, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

3.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Agriculture Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Agriculture sectoral format, held on 26 October 2011, following which she replied to questions.

3.3 Statement - Intergovernmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Co-operation

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Intergovernmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Co-operation, following which he replied to questions.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - Cancer Drugs Fund

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give consideration to the creation of a cancer drugs fund.

Mr A Ross

Mr P Weir

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson. Junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Cancer Drugs Fund (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6.2 Motion - Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in or Missing from Care

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses deep concern at the findings of the Barnardo's report 'Not a World Away', which exposes the level of risk of sexual exploitation for children and young people in or missing from care; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that all legislation is used to protect those children who are exposed to this risk, and that the perpetrators of sexual crimes against these children and young people are brought before the courts; and further calls on all Ministers to work together to provide the support and help that these children and young people need to keep them safe from sexual predators.

*Mr S Lynch
Ms J McCann
Mr F Molloy*

6.2 Amendment

Proposed:

After 'together' insert:

' , and with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, '

*Mr M Durkan
Mr C Eastwood
Mr C McDevitt*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.15pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

12 December 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 6 - 12 December 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Northern Ireland Tourist Board Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (NITB)

Food Safety Promotion Board Annual Report 2010 (DHSSPS)

Northern Ireland Assembly - Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL/PRONI)

National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DCAL)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/402 The Pollution Prevention and Control (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/403 The Waste Management Licensing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/405 The Banning Orders (Prescribed Persons) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/407 The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/408 Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Full-Time) (Severance) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/410 Superannuation (Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DFP)
- S.R. 2011/415 The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)
- S.R. 2011/419 The Criminal Appeal (Prosecution Appeals) (Banning Orders) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/420 The Crown Court (Amendment No.2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- Draft SR 2011/ The Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DHSSPS)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/413 The One-Way Traffic (Belfast) (Amendment No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/417 The Magistrates' Courts (Banning Orders) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/418 The Magistrates' Courts (Amendment No.2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/421 The County Court (Amendment No.3) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Alleged security breaches in relation to post-primary school entrance test papers of November 2009: report of the Department of Education's investigation (DE)

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on Proposed Increases to Contributions for Members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme – Supplement (DE)

Consultation on the Model of Shared Services for Implementation in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS)

Consultation on the proposals to close Hearing Centres at Bangor, Larne, Limavady, Magherafelt and Strabane Courthouses (DOJ)

Discussion Paper on the Future Administration and Structure of Tribunals in Northern Ireland (DOJ)

9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Tourist Board - Review of the Signature Projects (NIAO)

Addendum to Appendix 4 of the Department for Social Development Proposals for a Pensions Bill Completed Equality Impact Assessment - Summary of responses to Consultation and the Department's replies (DSD)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 December 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - Health and Social Care Review

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the Health and Social Care Review, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Special EU Programmes Sectoral Format

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement on the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Special EU Programmes sectoral format, held on 21 November 2011, following which he replied to questions.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Fractures Resulting from Osteoporosis

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place an emphasis on measures to prevent fractures resulting from osteoporosis in older people, aimed at helping to improve their health outcomes.

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

4.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

5. Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Fractures Resulting from Osteoporosis (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion - Pay Day Loans

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the number of companies that are offering short-term 'Pay Day Loans' to people who require additional money to make ends meet before their next pay day; and calls on the Executive to engage with Her Majesty's Government and the Financial Services Authority to ensure fair interest rates and protection for people taking such loans.

Mr A McQuillan

Mr P Girvan

Mr D Hilditch

Mr W Humphrey

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Mr Michael McGimpsey spoke to his topic on the amalgamation of the three Inner-South Belfast primary schools (Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street) on a new site at the City Hospital.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.40pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

13 December 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 13 December 2011

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
Disposal of Records Schedule for Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL/PRONI)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/416 The Goods Vehicles (Testing) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2011/423 The Drumnabreeze Road and Lough Road, Gamblestown, Donaghcloney (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2011/425 The Shipquay Place, Londonderry (No.2) (Footway) (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- For Information Only:**
 - S.R. 2011/425 The Parking Places on Roads (Lisburn) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publication

